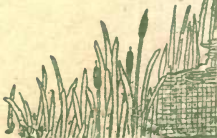
# UP THE FORKED RIVER

EDWARD S. ELLIS

S. EDWIN CORLE, JR.
HIS BOOK



THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

IN MEMORY OF
EDWIN CORLE

PRESENTED BY
JEAN CORLE

"I Am Betrayed—Sink the Tug."

STRANGE ADVENTURE SERIES.—No. 2.

# UP THE FORKED RIVER

OR,

## Adventures in South America

BY

SEWARD D. LISLE,

Author of "Teddy and Towser," etc., etc.

*ILLUSTRATED*

THE JOHN C. WINSTON CO.

CHICAGO PHILADELPHIA TORONTO

COPYRIGHTED, 1904,
BY
HENRY T. COATES & CO.

# UP THE FORKED RIVER

## OR

## ADVENTURES IN SOUTH AMERICA

### CHAPTER I.

WO friends were seated in the private office of Rowland & Starland, Montgomery Street, San Francisco, not long ago, discussing a subject in which both were much interested.

Each gentleman was past three-score, but they were well preserved, of rugged health, well to do and prosperous. They had got on for many years without so much as a shadow of difference between them. They had made the tour of Europe together, had engaged in many an outing and now as the evening of life was drawing on, they took matters with that complacency and comfort which was creditable to their good sense and which was warranted by their circumstances.

Mr. Thomas Starland, the junior partner, removed his cigar, leaned back in his chair, and, looking kindly into the face of his friend, said:

"Teddy, you came to California a number of years before I did."

The other, who was in a reminiscent mood, smoked in silence for a minute or so, looking up to the ceiling, and, when he replied, it was as if communing with himself:

"Yes; it is close upon half a century. How times flies! I was a small boy, and I often wonder how it was Providence took such good care of me."

"True, you were a young lad, but you had the best of companions."

"That is hardly correct, so far at least as one was concerned. When I left home in the East to join my father, who had come to California ahead of me, my companion was an Irishman named Micky McGuigan, who was as green as I."

"I have heard you speak of another comrade—a four-footed one."

"Ah, yes, our dog Towser, one of the most faithful and intelligent brutes that ever lived. He died long ago of old age and I have showed

my gratitude and love for his memory by placing a monument over his remains. Micky—peace to the memory of the good fellow—has also rested in the tomb for years, and it was not long after that my good father followed him,—so of all my companions on my first coming to the Pacific coast, not one remains."

"You could hardly have passed safely through the many dangers without the help of others," suggested Mr. Starland.

"I admit that. No braver man than Micky McGuigan ever lived. He had the traditional Irishman's love of a fight and he got plenty of it. But, Tom, our perils began, as you know, before we touched foot in California. Off the southern coast our steamer, the *Western Star,* was sunk in a collision. Teddy and I were left on the uninhabited coast (so far as white people are concerned), without so much as even a gun or pistol. Finding ourselves marooned, we struck into the interior, stole a couple of guns and some ammunition (what's the use of denying it at this late day?) from some Indians, and then went it blindly."

"I recall something of a partnership you made with an experienced miner."

"Yes; good fortune brought us together,

and it was a lucky thing indeed for us that we were picked up by Jo Harman, who piloted us through no end of dangers. We spent weeks in hunting for gold in what was then one of the wildest regions in the world."

"How did you make out?"

"We picked up a few particles, just enough to keep hope alive, but, in the end, had to give it up and take our chances in the diggings like the rest of the fortune hunters."

"Well, Teddy, we have proved that there are other ways of getting treasure than by digging in the earth for it."

"Yes, though it takes digging in any circumstances, and we had as hard times, at the beginning, as any of those who now dwell on Nob Hill."

From the above brief conversation, you will recall the principal character whom you met in the story of "Teddy and Towser." The lad who passed through more than one trying adventure had become a man well along in middle life. After settling in California, he made it his home. He married a lady of Spanish descent, to whom a single child was born,—Warrenia, now a miss almost out of her teens. Although Mr. Starland was

younger than his partner and married later in life, his son Jack was several years the elder of the daughter of Mr. Rowland.

Since these two young people have much to do in the chapters that follow, the reader must be given a clear understanding of them and their peculiar relation to each other.

While the parents had been partners in prosperity, they were also united in affliction, for each had lost his wife by death, when the children were small. Neither married again, for they had loved their life companions too deeply and profoundly to think seriously of trying to replace them.

Another minor but curious coincidence must be noted. Years after the marriage of the partners, Mr. Starland employed a Spanish priest to trace the genealogy of his wife, who felt a strong curiosity in the matter. In doing so, he discovered that several generations earlier, during the time of the Spanish settlement of the Southwest, the ancestors of Mrs. Starland and Mrs. Rowland were related. This was surprising but peculiarly pleasing to both families. Because of this remote relationship, so triturated indeed that it had really vanished into nothingness, Jack Star-

land and Warrenia Rowland called themselves cousins.

It was just like the headstrong, impulsive, mischievous youth to go still further. He hinted that the priest had not told the whole truth, having been bribed to suppress it by the father of Warrenia, for mysterious reasons, which he dared not divulge. What did this young hopeful do but insist that he and Warrenia were brother and sister! The idea, grotesquely impossible on the face of it, caused no end of merriment and ridicule, but Jack stubbornly maintained his claim. He declared further that the real name of Warrenia was the same as his own,—that is Starland. He often addressed her as Miss Starland, and she, with her fun-loving disposition, pretended to agree with him. When together, they almost invariably spoke to or of each other as brother and sister, and there were not lacking those who believed they were actually thus related.

The odd whim gave the parents no little amusement and they too at times humored it. The very absurdity of the fancy gave it its comicality.

You can understand how deeply each par-

ent loved his child. Nothing seemed more natural than that the son and daughter should become man and wife when they grew up, though neither father as yet had made any reference to such an event which would have been pleasing to both and eminently fit in every respect.

Jack and Warrenia grew to maturity as if they really were brother and sister. She was sent East to attend one of the most famous young ladies' schools in the country. Jack was on the point of entering Harvard, when he received an appointment to West Point. There under the strict regulations he gained few opportunities of seeing his "sister." When he did so, it was when she and some of her classmates, under proper chaperonage visited the model military institution on the banks of the Hudson.

Jack was graduated in time to take part in our war with Spain. He won a fine reputation at San Juan Hill, and would have received his well merited promotion, but when a Major by brevet, he resigned to become interested in his father's business, which was growing to a degree that new blood and vigor were required for its full development.

## CHAPTER II.

PERHAPS Jack Starland's most noticeable trait in boyhood was his fondness for the water. He was a magnificent swimmer and learned to handle a small boat with the skill of a veteran sailor. Some of his dare-devil exploits in cruising among the Farallones and down the coast caused his father great concern. He placed such severe restrictions upon the lad that he rebelled. One day he slipped out of the house, went down to the wharf and engaged to go as cabin boy on a South Sea whaler. At the critical moment, however, his conscience asserted itself and he drew back. His father never knew of this particular episode in the life of his son. Had it been carried out, it would have broken the parent's heart.

It was shortly after this that Jack received his appointment to the Military Academy. He had told his "sister" Warrenia of his

narrow escape from playing the part of a fool and ingrate, and naturally she was horrified.

"There never would have been the slightest excuse for such folly and wickedness," said she, as the two sat in a palace car of the overland train, flying eastward; "you have the kindest of fathers and you can never do enough to repay your obligations to him."

"I admit all that," replied the young man smiling, "but what's the use of rubbing it in when I *didn't* run away?"

"But you started to do so," she persisted.

"And stopped in time: what was wrong in *that?*"

"It was wrong that you should have had a minute when you seriously intended to commit the crime."

"Commit the crime!" he repeated, with a reproving look; "perhaps it would have been a crime, but I'm not so sure about that."

"I am; Jack I'm ashamed of you."

"So am I; but don't forget that I was younger then than now."

"Yes; two or three months; persons sometimes grow a good deal in that period."

"They may not grow so much in stature, but they do in sense."

"I have heard of such instances, but I do not remember to have met any."

"Come now, sister," laughed the youth who admired his friend's brilliancy, "I beg you to let up; I confess all you have charged; I am a base villain, for whom hanging would be too good; you will be filled with remorse when I become General of the army and you recall all the harsh words you have said of me."

"*When* you become General I will mourn my cruelty in sackcloth and ashes. But I am willing to change the subject. Let us drop the past and talk of the future. Your term at West Point I believe is four years."

"Provided I'm not 'found' as the expression goes. But I'm not really admitted as yet, though I passed the preliminary examination before leaving home and won my appointment in a competitive contest. The decisive examination will take place at the Point when I get there; I understand it is severe, but I am quite confident."

"You always were, no matter what issue was involved."

Since we have already learned that all went well with the young man, it is not neces-

sary to repeat the speculation of the couple as they steamed eastward. Jack did enter the Military Academy, and, as I have said, made a creditable record for himself. Warrenia Rowland at the same time became a student in the famous young ladies' seminary, to which further reference will be made later, and the two were graduated within a few weeks of each other.

It would be supposed that the military career upon which Major Jack Starland entered would have extinguished his love of boating and the water, but it did not. Could he have chosen his profession it would have been that of the navy, and he would have entered the Academy at Annapolis, but that could not be arranged and he threw his whole energies into the military work.

Now it chanced that Jack's room mate and intimate friend was the son of a prominent ship builder in the East. This youth was as fond of the sea as the young Californian. In one respect he was more fortunate, for his father had presented him with a superb yacht, with which he had cruised up and down the Atlantic coast and made a trip or two to the West Indies. I may as well add that this

same yacht was placed at the disposal of our government at the opening of the war with Spain and did good service in scouting in Cuban waters.

The cadets at West Point have only one vacation during their four years' course; that comes at the end of two years and lasts for a couple of months. Jack Starland made a flying visit home and then accepted the invitation of his room mate to go on a cruise with him in his yacht. It being in the summer time, the craft headed northward and visited Newport, Bar Harbor and several other noted resorts on the Atlantic seaboard.

The excursion was a continual delight to both young men, who, as you are aware, must have been fine specimens of physical vigor, or they would not have been in the Military Academy. Jack wrote such a glowing account of his holiday that his father's heart was touched. He read the letter to his partner who remarked:

"A good sailor was spoiled when Jack became a soldier."

"I never knew a lad with a stronger liking for a nautical life. Nothing would have delighted him more than to become a sailor.

What makes me respect Jack, is that with all this overwhelming fondness for a sailor's life, he has had too much good sense to yield to it. He has never asked me to allow him to go to sea, but has always placed my wishes first. Do you know, Teddy, that even when a headlong, impetuous youngster, he must have withstood temptation with Roman firmness. Of course for the last year or two no thought of going contrary to my desires has ever entered his mind."

(Ah, fond parent, you are but a single example of multitudes of fathers, who have kept their eyes closed to what was going on within touch of their hands.)

"A father is a poorer judge of his children than others. My love for Jack is hardly second to yours, but I am not blind to his faults. I am glad to say that he hasn't any more of them than he is entitled to have. No father ever had a more obedient son; judging the boy therefore, in cold blood, I must say I agree fully with you. If anybody had suggested to Jack when a boy that he should go contrary to your wishes or run away, he would have made it a *casus belli.*"

(From which remark, it would appear that

the father of a boy is not always the only one who makes an error concerning the youth.)

"What I'm getting at, Teddy, is this: the reading of that letter from Jack has caused me to decide upon a piece of extravagance. I'm going to present him with a handsome yacht."

"It will cost you a tidy sum, Tom."

"I know that, but it will be a good investment. He may not have many opportunities for enjoying it while he is an officer of the army, but unless we have war very soon, Jack will follow the example of many others who have been educated at West Point and resign, holding himself at the disposal of the government whenever needed. Of course his ultimate destination is here, in our business, in this office, and the yacht will come in handy during his vacation times."

"And probably add to the number of his vacations."

"Which will be well; for it can be said of few of our business men that they have more vacations than are necessary or good for them."

"May I give you a suggestion, Tom?"

"I am always glad to receive anything of the kind from you."

"We can make as good yachts on this side of the continent as in the shipyards of the East. Nevertheless, purchase Jack's yacht in the East."

"Why?"

"To bring it through the Golden Gate, he will have to come around Cape Horn."

"A pretty risky voyage,—one that tests the staunchness of a boat and the seamanship of the captain."

"True, and make it a condition that Jack himself shall bring the yacht to California."

"It shall be done,—nothing will delight the young rascal more."

## CHAPTER III.

THE reputation of the Misses Credell's Young Ladies' Seminary was international and the halo of its history was sanctified by time. It was founded by the grandmother of the estimable sisters, one of the foremost educators of her day, and one who took up the profession of teaching through love for it, since her wealth made her independent for life.

At the period when the institution rises before us, its students represented the four quarters of the globe. There were young women fitting for the missionary field in India and China; the daughters of eminent financiers in England, Germany, France and Spain, those whose parents' influence was felt in distant climes, including several from the revolution-pestered republics of South America.

Manuela Estacardo was the only child of the deceased sister of President Pedro Yoz-

arro, Dictator of Atlamalco. She was a brilliant daughter of the tropics, gifted in mind and person, with the midnight eyes and hair, the dark complexion, classical features, small white teeth and faultless form rarely seen except in the fervid sunlight of the low latitudes. Positive and negative electricity draw together, which perhaps explains why the two most devoted intimates at the seminary were Señorita Estacardo and Warrenia Rowland. The latter was a true product of the North, with blue eyes, pink skin, hair like the floss of the ripening corn, and a figure as perfect as her sister's of the South, while the mental gifts in one were equalled in the other.

The friendship of these two began with their first meeting, and continued unrippled to the sad day of gladness when they were graduated. Manuela spent most of her vacations in the home of Warrenia in California, and the promise had been solemnly given by the latter that she would visit her friend after her return to her distant home under the equator. The story of this sweet comradeship cannot be told in a fractional part of its fulness. To prevent any misunderstanding, however, on the part of the

reader, let it be known that though Major Jack Starland and the Señorita were often together, and they became the warmest of friends, there never was and there never could be any tenderer feeling between them. And this was true for the best of reasons: the dark-eyed Señorita had pledged her heart to a certain young officer of her own country. Both were as loyal in their affections as is the magnet to the pole and there was no possible room for complications.

When Mr. Starland presented the handsome yacht to his son Jack, neither he nor his partner Mr. Rowland dreamed of the strange consequences that were to follow. Jack resigned his commission in the army, his yacht, which he had named the Warrenia, in honor of his "sister," was returned to him with the thanks of the United States government, and he was then ready to carry out the stipulation of his father, that he should bring the craft around Cape Horn to San Francisco. Her usefulness when in the naval service, required her presence in the Atlantic, but she was now free to go whither her owner willed. Thus the perilous voyage had been postponed for a few years.

Manuela Estacardo had returned to her home in tropical America, and she and her dearest friend, Warrenia Rowland, were never laggard in their correspondence. The South American insisted that Warrenia should make her long-promised visit, and the daughter of the North was eager to do so. The journey, however, was so long and difficult that no practicable way presented itself until in a twinkling, as may be said, the path was cleared by the decision of Major Starland to double Cape Horn with his yacht.

What was to prevent his taking Warrenia as a passenger, ascend the Amazon to the home of Manuela and pay that cherished visit? The plan was so simple that every one to whom it was mentioned wondered why it was not thought of before. Aunt Cynthia would accompany her niece as chaperon, and the pause would cause little delay in the voyage. What matter if it did, for time was of no special consequence, and a few weeks, one way or the other, were not worth taking into account.

When Mr. Rowland proposed to his partner that a condition of the gift of the yacht to his son ought to be the severe test of a voy-

age under the latter's direction around Cape Horn, he never imagined that his daughter was to share the danger. But he could not ask that the young man of whom he was so fond should be compelled to face a peril of that nature in which he would refuse his daughter a share. It cost him a pang to yield, but he did so without murmur, and fondly kissed her good bye, with never a thought of the remarkable experience she would be called upon to pass through.

As for good Aunt Cynthia, she was wholly ignorant of what in the most favorable circumstances was inevitable. The smothering temperature, the plague of insect life and the actual dangers from the character of the natives themselves, were wholly unknown and unsuspected by her. Had she understood one-half the truth, not even her love for her niece would have impelled her to leave her comfortable home, nor would she ever have given her consent that Warrenia should engage in any such wild, foolhardy undertaking. But Aunt Cynthia's education had been of the early fashionable kind, which furnished only the smallest modicum of knowledge. You may be sure that the younger ones, who

knew a good deal more about the country and the people, took care not to enlighten her when they answered her numerous inquiries.

However, all was satisfactorily arranged and Señorita Estacardo was thrown into transports of delight by the receipt of a letter saying that by the time it reached the young woman, a Miss Rowland would be out on the ocean in the charge of their old friend, Major Jack Starland, and well on their way to the home of the Señorita, where they intended to make a good long visit, before resuming their long voyage around the southern point of the continent and then up the western coast to San Francisco.

Ascending the mighty Amazon to the mouth of the Rio Rubio, known also as the Forked River, the yacht reached the home of Señorita Estacardo, who, it need not be said, gave the most joyous welcome to the girl whom she loved more than any one else in the wide world.

Before reaching its present destination, the *Warrenia* came to the little republic of Zalapata, where a pause was made for two or three days, during which the Major and the young ladies called upon General Bambos,

the President and Dictator, who treated them with the utmost consideration. Later, he became the guest of Major Starland on the yacht, upon which he spent most of his time while the Americans lay off that quaint town. The susceptible heart of the bulky South American crackled into flame on the first sight of the northern beauty, though he smothered the secret so well that none except the young woman herself suspected it and with her it was scarcely more than a suspicion.

From Zalapata the yacht steamed to Atlamalco, the home of Manuela Estacardo. There the party was received by the other impressionable type of the tropics, General Pedro Yozarro, who left nothing undone to make their visit pleasant in the highest degree. The novelty of her experience was its chief enjoyment to Miss Rowland, who found a thrill in the life, with its conditions the opposite of those to which she had always been accustomed. She and her aunt were received into the household of General Yozarro, who immediately became their humble slave. Since the death of his wife and sister, the latter taking place shortly after the return of his niece, Manuela, the latter had been the

head of the household and its retinue of servants.

The Señorita had been told the agreement between Major Starland and Miss Rowland, which was that during their visit to this part of the world, they were to be known as brother and sister. She was to be addressed as Miss Warrenia Starland. Her hostess faithfully carried out the wishes of her friend.

"It was Jack's proposition," explained Warrenia; "he seems never able to get over that absurd fancy of his boyhood that we are really brother and sister, when in fact we do not bear the slightest relation to each other. I wanted him to use my name, but he is so stubborn he wouldn't agree to it. You know there is some similarity in our names, but he said it would be much more convenient for me to take his."

"There are several good reasons why you should do so," said the Señorita with a meaning smile; "one of which is that you will grow accustomed to it."

"But what advantage is there in that?"

"It will come easier when you *do* make the change."

"I can't pretend to misunderstand you, but I am sure that will never take place; neither Jack nor I has such a thought."

"How do you know what *his* thoughts are?"

"Would he not have told me long ago?"

"Hasn't he done so?"

"Not so much as by a hint. It has really been as brother and sister between us. He has always accepted that relation and so have I."

"You give no reason why it should not soon assume a tenderer and closer nature; I believe it will; I shall be delighted."

"Ah, my dear Manuela, I know your heart, but we of the North do not make love as you of the tropics. One of these days, Jack will meet the right woman."

"I believe he met her years ago."

"Meaning me, but you are mistaken."

"How is it with *you?*"

"I am still heart free. I won't deny that I have met one or two with whom I was pleased, but it was nothing more."

"Because your love has gone elsewhere; it went long ago; you may think I am mistaken,

my darling Warrenia, but you will soon find I am not."

Then both laughed, kissed and talked of other things.

## CHAPTER IV.

ENERAL Fernando De Bambos, President and Dictator of Zalapata, had summoned one of the most momentous councils of war in the history of the Republic. Those present were our old friend, Major Jack Starland, who was a guest of the General, and Captain Alfredo Guzman, Chief of Staff. The other leaders sulked because they were not invited to the conference, but General Bambos dared not trust them with the important matters that were oppressing his ponderous brain and had troubled him for weeks.

The meeting was held in the upper room of the east wing of the palace, safely removed from eavesdroppers, two armed guards on the outside of the door adding to the isolation of the council. General Bambos, though short of stature, weighed an eighth of a ton. His uniform gleamed with blue, scarlet and gold, and the crimson sash around his waist, with

its gilt tassels almost touching the floor, was six inches nearer his head in front than at the rear. His crimson countenance was set off by a prodigious mustache, the waxed ends of which, when he grinned, tickled his temples. He was short-breathed, asthmatic and possessed a tempestuous temper. The big curved sword at his side flipped the ground when he strode to and fro, as was his custom while agitated, though during his calmer moods, the formidable weapon swung fairly clear of the floor.

Captain Guzman, Aide and Chief of Staff, was swarthy, deliberate and cool, and of moderate stature. He had proved himself a good soldier in more than one fight with their neighbors in that breeding-nest of revolutions.

At the present time, the *Warrenia* was absent for a few days at San Luis, down the river, while Jack Starland was the honored guest of General Bambos, who was eager to secure his valuable military ability for the republic. He really knew nothing of the young American's experience in military matters, but he was not ignorant of the bravery of his people, and had learned how com-

pletely they crushed Spain in the late war. When he heard the youth addressed as "Major" he was immediately fired with the ambition to gain him as an ally, in the new revolution that was impending.

"Comrades," said the General, as he heaved ponderously to his feet, addressing the two who sat at the table, listening expectantly to him, "you will agree with me that golden opportunities come to nations as well as to men. Such an opportunity has opened to the Republic of Zalapata."

As he spoke, he leaned forward with his hands resting on the table, and the chubby fingers doubled in upon the palms. His huge mustache twitched, and his little black eyes shone upon the placid countenance of Captain Guzman, lolling in his chair at the farther end and languidly smoking a cigarette. The Captain calmly met the flickering glare and the General shifted it to Major Starland on his right, who was looking through the open window on the other side of the apartment, as if the blue sky, with its fleecy clouds, framed by the opening, was all that interested him. None the less, he was thinking hard and not a word escaped him.

"I repeat that such an opportunity has now opened to the Republic of Zalapata."

The thin husky voice climbed several notes of the register, and the right hand of the speaker thumped so hard on the table that it shook. The noise would have been considerable, had not the impact been dulled by the fleshy cushion that smothered the knuckles of the orator.

Without stirring a muscle, Major Starland glanced sideways at the face of the General, who swung his head around like a turtle peeping from his shell and stared again at Captain Guzman. The latter snatched his cigarette from his lips and nodded quickly several times.

General Bambos swung back to the upright poise, or rather went a little beyond it since his bulky protuberance in front gave him the appearance of leaning backward. The deepening crimson of his countenance showed the profundity of his anger.

"How much longer shall we submit to the insults of that infamous tyrant, President Yozarro of the Republic of Atlamalco, Actuated by my fervent love of peace, my affection for my people, and my ardent desire for

their happiness, I have acquiesced in wrong, vainly hoping that a sense of justice would restrain the oppressor from going too far. But he mistakes our calmness for fear, until every man of intelligence clearly perceives that unless resistance is made,—not simple resistance alone, but aggressive protest, the grand, glorious Republic of Zalapata will become a mere appanage of Atlamalco. I have remonstrated with General Yozarro, and in return he treats me with contumely and insult. My nature revolts, my blood is stirred—"

To make more emphatic the ebullition of his circulation, General Bambos abruptly stopped speaking and snatched out his perfumed silk handkerchief from beneath the partly unbuttoned breast of his coat, and mopped his lumpy forehead. He had carefully conned his oration, but his surging emotion would not give him pause. The climax leaped from him. At the highest reach of his vibrant, staccato voice, he shouted:

"The time has come to draw the sword!"

Grasping the top of his scabbard with his left hand, and the handle of his sword with his right, he made a curving swing upward,

while drawing the blade from its nestling place. There was always difficulty in doing this, since when the arm was extended to its limit, two or three inches of the point of the weapon remained in the sheath. The only way to overcome the hitch was to push downward and backward with the hand which inclosed the upper part of the scabbard. In his excitement, the General forgot this necessity, and, with the right arm extended to the highest elevation, the weapon was not free from the incumbrance at the other end. He tugged, swore under his breath and grew purple of countenance.

Major Starland, without the shadow of a smile, looked at the lower hand of the General and nodded meaningly. The other recovered his wits at the same moment, liberated the blade by the method indicated, and flourished it so far aloft that the keen point nipped the ceiling.

"The time has come to draw the sword! Liberty, justice, equality and right is the war cry of the patriots of Zalapata!"

Carefully adjusting his weapon so that it would not interfere, the General sagged down in his chair, and puffing from his exertion

and excitement, looked into the faces of his friends to signify that he was now ready to listen to their sentiments. A brief silence followed, and then Major Starland said in an even voice:

"I have learned of some of the insults received from General Yozarro, Dictator of the Republic to the west, but I am not clear as to the last outrage: may I be enlightened?"

He looked invitingly at Captain Guzman, who silently puffed for a minute or so before speaking:

"A month ago, the single boat which constitutes the navy of President Yozarro was engaged in target practice; one of the shots passed over the boundary and struck the dwelling of a citizen of Zalapata, smashing in a side-wall and scaring the family to that extent that they are still a-tremble. Complaint was made to President Yozarro, who treated the complainant with contempt. Then appeal was had to President Bambos, who despatched a messenger to Yozarro, demanding damages and an apology, and the salutation of our flag. What answer did the tyrant send? He kicked the messenger down the steps of his palace, bidding him to tell our

revered President that if he or anyone else came to him on a similar errand, he would ram him down the throat of one of his cannon and fire at the palace of General Bambos."

"But that threat is idle," gravely remarked Major Starland.

"Why?" demanded President Bambos.

"Neither he nor you have any ordnance big enough to allow a man to serve as a charge for it."

"A quibble!" commented the Captain; "it does not lessen the deadly nature of the insult."

"What is the amount of the claim?"

General Bambos nodded to the Captain to answer.

"Forty-two *pesos*."

"Ah-um!" mused the American, who picked up a pencil from the table and made a few figures on a blotting pad; "the present value of a *peso* is twenty-eight cents. That would make the total damage eleven dollars and seventy-six cents in the currency of my country. Does President Yozarro refuse to pay this claim?"

"He not only refuses to pay the just demand," thundered the President, "but ac-

companies his refusal with an unpardonable insult."

"No one can deny that you have cause for indignation, but knowing how deeply you have the good of your people and country at heart, General, I would ask whether there is not some way of settling the dispute without going to war."

"Explain yourself," said the President severely, for, having set his heart on having war, he did not mean to be bluffed out of it.

"Why not refer the dispute to The Hague Tribunal of Arbitration?"

"What good could come from that?"

"Suppose it decided in your favor and ordered General Yozarro to pay the claim?"

"That wouldn't wipe out the insult."

"But, if he was ordered to apologize?"

"He wouldn't do it."

"How do you know he wouldn't?"

"Don't I know the man better than The Hague Tribunal or anyone else knows him?"

"If you have so clear a case against President Yozarro, the decision is sure to be in your favor."

"You forget, Sir, that The Hague has in-

sulted the Republic of Zalapata through its President."

"I was not aware of that."

"When the members assembled a short time ago, I sent a representative with a request that he be permitted to act as one of them. Do you know what reply was made? They said they had never heard of the Republic of Zalapata."

"In other words, they told you to make a reputation first. Quite natural, under the circumstances. Nevertheless, I would beg to insist that the proper course is to refer this quarrel to The Hague Tribunal, unless the President of the United States can be induced to act as arbitrator. More than likely he will settle the wrangle by paying the claim out of his own pocket."

"You mistake your man!" roared General Bambos; "you fail to see that that would relieve General Yozarro from punishment for his insults and outrages against Zalapata. It would encourage him to continue his infamous course, since our powerful neighbor on the north would relieve him from all penalty. Moreover, it would display a fatal timidity on the part of the United States regarding

their pet idol,—the Monroe Doctrine. Such a subterfuge cannot be permitted."

"I had thought of offering to pay the bill myself."

With fine sarcasm, General Bambos said:

"I am glad you are provided with a surfeit of funds. Perhaps you will be willing to float our last loan?"

"That depends upon its size; if it isn't more than a few hundred dollars I am quite ready to give you a lift."

"I must decline to permit any more quibbling."

"Will you consent that I shall close the incident by paying this claim against President Yozarro of the Republic of Atlamalco?"

"I do if you will agree to enforce the other conditions."

"What are they?"

"That he shall apologize, salute our flag and pledge himself never again to turn his gun in the direction of our boundary line."

"You have added impossible terms, General, for you would bind him to make no resistance in the event of your going to war with him."

"And don't you perceive on your part that

there is nothing to arbitrate? This talk of arbitration is very fine for the one who is in the wrong. Suppose a set of employees refuse to work any longer unless their wages are doubled. The employer, knowing it means his ruin, refuses, and the strikers demand that the dispute shall be referred to arbitration. Is that just?—is it common sense?"

"Not on the part of the employees. But your supposition is hardly supposable; the employers would incur no risk in agreeing to arbitration, since no committee on earth would fail to decide in their favor, after the whole truth was made clear to them. I have noticed that it is generally the one who is in the wrong who refuses to arbitrate. At the same time, I concede that there can be no such thing as forced arbitration. Every employer or capitalist has the right to run his own business to suit himself, just as any man, or set of men, have the right to quit work and to try to persuade their friends to quit with them; but, your pardon, General; we are wandering from the question."

"A suggestion I was about to make. When you reflect that a respectful demand has been made upon President Yozarro for the pay-

ment of a just claim, and that he brutally refuses, what would you advise, most wise and honored Sir?"

"I have offered to pay the claim myself."

"Your offer is declined, since you cannot enforce all the conditions."

"I have named arbitration."

"And I have pointed out the impossible folly of such a thing"

"Admitting that President Yozarro refuses to comply with the decision of The Hague Tribunal, you will not only be free to carry out your original intention, but you will be justified before the world."

"No more than I shall be justified *now*, for many of the Atlamalcans themselves condemn the course of their President."

"Why not make one more appeal to him?"

"How shall I shape my message? Whom shall I send to bear it to him?"

"I will be the messenger."

"And be returned to me from the throat of a cannon?"

"I will take my chances on that; if they have a gun capacious enough to expedite matters in that fashion, the journey certainly will

not be a monotonous one. You forget one thing, General."

"What is that?"

"My sister is the guest of President Yozarro; I am anxious to see her; this gives me the opportunity."

## CHAPTER V.

MAJOR Jack Starland decided to make his ambassadorial trip to the Atlamalcan Republic by water instead of land, and to take as his companion, Captain Guzman, though there would have seemed to be slight choice between the two routes.

The Rio Rubio, flowing from the foot of the Andes, eastward to the Atlantic, forks a few miles to the westward of Atlamalco, the two branches reuniting twenty leagues to the eastward. The island thus formed is twenty miles across the widest part, and tapers to the east and west. As if nature aimed to provide for two distinct communities, a precipitous mountain spur, which sprawls several hundred miles north and south, ribs the territory almost mathematically in the centre, and tumbles onward, broken and disjointed, to the shores of the Caribbean Sea. The rumors that gold and diamonds are awaiting garner-

ing in the wild solitudes have roused the earth hunger of more than one powerful nation, but the grim dragon that crouches in the pulsing jungles, on whose forehead flames the legend, "MONROE DOCTRINE," sends them scudding back across the seas.

The western half of the island forms the Republic of Atlamalco, whose President and Dictator is General Pedro Yozarro; the eastern half constitutes Zalapata, with General Fernando de Bambos at its head. The name "republic," as applied to the peppery provinces has as much appropriateness as if given to Russia or China. The respective population of the two republics is about the same, and but for the whimsical, intense jealousy that is the most marked peculiarity of South American countries, the two might grow rich, prosperous and of considerable strength, for no region on the globe is more favored in the way of climatic and natural resources.

Major Starland understood the delicate tensity of the relations between Zalapata and Atlamalco. They had been at war before, with the advantage at times on one side and then on the other, the final result being no decisive change in their mutual strength or in

their combative propensities. The addition of a "gunboat" to the power of Atlamalco naturally made her more aggressive and demonstrative. President Bambos dreamed of acquiring two similar engines of war, when he would proceed to wipe his hated rival off the earth; but the loan which he tried to float remained inert and the northern barbarians, whose shipyards send forth most of the navies of the world, insisted upon cash or security as preliminary to laying the keels of the Zalapatan fleet. The project therefore hung fire. Though the craft that roamed up and down the bifurcated river was referred to as a gunboat, it was simply an American tug, some seventy-five feet in length, of the same tonnage and with a single six-pounder mounted fore and another aft. From New York it had sneaked southward, so far as possible, through the inland passage to the Gulf of Mexico and then puffed across the Caribbean and so on to the Rio Rubio and thence to its destination.

As intimated, Major Starland had the choice of two routes to the western Republic: one by mule path or trail through the Rubio

Mountains, and the other by boat, fifty miles up the Rio Rubio: he chose the latter.

On the morning following the council of war, he and his swarthy friend, Captain Guzman, hoisted sail on their little catboat, at the wharf of the capital, and catching the favoring breeze, curved out into the stream, which was half a mile wide, and began their voyage against a moderate current. Old campaigners like them needed little luggage. The native officer took none at all, while the Major's was in a small hand bag, which he had brought from his yacht, twenty miles away at San Luis.

The American seated himself at the stern, where he controlled the tiller, while the native lounged on the front seat smoking his eternal cigarette. Behind them the pretty little capital, with its five thousand inhabitants, distributed mostly in adobe huts, shabby and of small dimensions, gradually sank out of sight, and finally vanished behind a bend in the river. To the right, stretched the immense undulating plain of exuberant forest, with its tropical luxuriance, its smothering climate and its overwhelming animal life. The banks on either hand were flat,

and so low that a continuous east wind often brought an overflow of the shores for leagues inland. Here and there the bamboo or adobe hut of a native peeped from the rank foliage, and the naked or half-dressed occupants stared stupidly at the craft as it skimmed past. The head of the family lolled on the bank, or in the shade beside his home and smoked; the stolid wife slouched hither and thither like an automaton, plodding at her work or perhaps scratching the ground, that it might laugh a harvest, though oftener her work lay in fighting off the prodigious growth which threatened to strangle everybody and everything. She took her turn at smoking, while the youngsters, most of them without a thread of clothing, frolicked and tumbled in the simple delight of existence. But all these were such common sights to the voyageurs that they gave them no more than passing attention.

Captain Guzman was not a talkative man. He preferred to lounge, to smoke, to fight, or to think. Major Starland had plenty of thinking to do and little work. Having guided the craft out into the middle of the stream, he rested the tiller between his elbow

and side and held the boat to its course, while he also lazily puffed at his cigar. He glanced from side to side, like one who was familiar with the scenery and he figured out that if the breeze held, they would reach Atlamalco early on the morrow, for he did not mean to continue the voyage after darkness had set in.

No one, however, can sail for a mile over the tropical waters of South America without a striking experience with its myriad animal life. The swarms of fish often clog the progress of vessels. Numerous tiny thumps against the prow of the boat told of the miniature collisions, and, looking over the side, the American saw more fish than water. They varied in length from a few inches to a couple of feet or more. Recognizing one vicious species, he caught up a pole and thrust an end into the current. Instantly fierce snaps followed, and when he drew out the dripping stick, its extremity was gouged as if with dagger stabs.

"What little demons those caribs are!" he said, holding up the pole for the Captain to see. The native nodded his head and silently smoked on. Had either of them trailed his hand in the current alongside the boat, a

finger would have been nipped off in a flash by those concentrated sharks.

There was a rush like that of the Atlamalcan tugboat and an immense alligator surged up from the muddy depths, and kept pace with the craft, as though tied to it. His piggish eyes surveyed the two men as if meditating the crushing of the boat and its occupants in one terrific crunch, like the hippopotamus of the Nile. He partly opened and smacked his jaws, in anticipation, and slightly increasing his speed, passed forward to the prow.

Finally Captain Guzman showed an interest in matters. Sitting up, he drew his revolver from the belt around his waist, aimed quickly and fired. The bullet darted into the nearer eye and ripped through what little brain the saurian possessed. With a snort, it whirled, darted several rods out into the stream, and then spun round and round, as if caught in the vortex of a whirlpool. Slight in one sense as was the wound, it was mortal and quickly drew the attention of other alligators, who seemed to be projected upward from the ooze of the river, and assailed their unfortunate comrade with remorseless feroc-

ity. In a twinkling he was torn piecemeal by the cannibals, whose taste of blood set aflame their rapacity. Had they known enough they might have smashed the boat with their tails or rolled it over with their snouts; but, unaware of their own strength, they kept up their wild darting to and fro and were soon left behind.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE Captain resumed his lolling posture, placed another cartridge in his revolver and lit a fresh cigarette. By and by his eyes closed and Major Starland saw that he slept. The American arose to his feet, yawned and stretched his arms over his head, holding the tiller in place between his knees.

"Unless I am alert I shall fall asleep too, and then the mischief will be to pay. It isn't prudent to disturb these creatures, but to hold a position of armed neutrality. If the fools don't know their power, it isn't wise to set them investigating."

To the right on the mainland, the low flat plain extended to the limit of vision. The tall, reedy grass came down to the edge of the water, and the nodding plumes showed for some distance out in the stream. Several miles in advance, on the same shore, the dark green mass of a forest buffeted against the

soft sky, the species of trees being innumerable and so closely wedged in many places, that not even the attenuated Captain Guzman could have forced his way through except by scrambling from limb to limb.

The southern bank was similar, but far to the westward, the rugged outline of the Rubio Mountains rose in the sky and wore the soft blue tint of the sea of clear atmosphere. Beyond the mountains, snuggled the Republic of Atlamalco which was the destination of the American.

On the northern bank, two-score wild cattle that had been browsing on the succulent grass, loafed down to the river and waded out till the current bathed their sides. They sought the water for its coolness at this oppressive period of the day and to escape the billions of insect pests that at times make life a torment. Their tails, whose bushy tips flirted the water in showers over their heads and backs, were never idle. Some of them kept edging outward until no more than their spines, horns, ears, and the upper part of their heads remained in sight.

The leader of the herd was a magnificent black bull, who stood on the bank and bel-

lowed at the boat sailing past, as if challenging it to a fight to the finish. He was afraid of nothing on earth and revelled in a battle which would allow him to display his tremendous prowess, power and wrath.

Seeing that the boat paid no heed to his thunderous challenge, the bull galloped sideways and backward to shore, and trotted along its bank, looking at the craft, thrusting out his snout and calling for it to come ashore and have it out with him. Major Starland picked up his Krag-Jorgensen from where it leaned beside his feet and sighted at the bull, into whose bellowing there seemed to intrude a regretful note over the ignoring of his challenge.

"It's a pretty good distance, but I can drop you so quickly you would never know what did it, and, being that you wouldn't know, where's the satisfaction to either of us? I'll be hanged if I uncrown such a noble monarch in that pot fashion!"

The weapon was laid down and the Major resumed his seat and care of the tiller. At this time the bull was standing on a slight rise of ground, just clear of the water with Major Starland contemplating the superb fellow.

Something dark and sinuous suddenly darted out like a black streak of lightning from the mud just in front of the animal and the cry of the bull changed to one of frenzy. He was scared at last.

Still bellowing, he planted his four hoofs rigidly in the mud, and leaned so far backward that his legs were inclined at a sharp angle. His feet sank slowly and he yielded a short, reluctant step. Then he paused and putting forth his great strength gradually moved the hoofs, one after the other, backward. He strove mightily to continue his retreat, but the uplifted fore foot was instantly jammed down again, and the utmost he could do was to hold his own.

The black thing which had flashed out from the mud a few paces away was the head of a gigantic anaconda that had hidden itself in the slime and was waiting for cow or bull to come within reach. The instant the king of the herd did so, the head shot from its concealment and the teeth were snapped together in the cartilage of the animal's nose. Then the serpent began drawing its victim forward with terrific power. The bull knew his peril and resisted to the last ounce of his strength.

But the reptile was a fool. Had it voluntarily freed itself, or allowed the bull to get clear of the enveloping mushy earth, it could have whirled its entire length around the quadruped and mashed it to pulp. But the Atlamalcan tugboat, if tied by a hawser to the reptile could not have drawn it forth, for it will allow itself to be pulled asunder before yielding. Nor can any conceivable power induce the serpent to let go, its unshakable resolve being to draw its prey within its folds, instead of meeting its victim.

It was a veritable tug of war, and the sympathies of Major Starland were wholly on the side of the bull. Slipping a bit of rope over the tiller to hold it in place, he knelt on one knee and sighted with the utmost care. The six or eight feet of the reptile which was clear of the mud had been stretched to nearly double its natural length by the furious pulling of the bull, and was as tense as a violin string and so attenuated as to be hardly one-half its ordinary diameter. The American aimed at a point just back of the head and the bullet sped true. Perhaps, as is sometimes the case, the serpent's body would have yielded in the end, but the missile expedited mat-

ters. It snapped apart, the bull with another bellow whirled about and galloped up the bank and away, with the appendage dangling and flapping from his nose, there to hang until it sloughed off.

The report of the rifle awakened Captain Guzman, who sat up, but did not understand all that had taken place until it was explained to him. Then the two partook of the lunch they had brought with them. When the brief twilight closed over forest and stream, they had passed three-fourths of the distance between the respective capitals of the republics. Night had fully come, however, before the boat was sheered toward the mainland, and drawing it up the bank beyond the reach of the current, the two stepped out and walked a short way to a hut that had caught their notice some time before.

Here, strange to say, the native man and wife had only two children, both boys, six or eight years of age, naked and not ashamed. Captain Guzman, who spoke Spanish as well as the American, explained that they desired food and lodging for the night. The husband told them they were welcome, while the slatternly helpmate said nothing, but did her part

with commendable diligence. No fire was burning, nor was one started, though the cinders on the outside showed that food was sometimes cooked after the manner of civilized peoples. No table, chairs or furniture were seen, while the floor was of smooth, hard earth. A large, earthen bowl was nearly filled with a mixture of tomatoes, onions, olives and several kinds of fruit chopped together. This was set outside on the ground, between the two guests, who ate and were filled.

## CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH the hot pulsing of the tropical midnight, with its myriad throbbings of animal life, came the sound of husky coughing, steadily growing more distinct, until the two men seated on the outside of the native hut, on a fallen tree, smoking and listening, identified it as the voice of the Atlamalcan tugboat, named for its owner, *General Yozarro*. In the vivid moonlight, a dim mass assumed form up the river, the sparks tumbling from its small smokestack helping to locate the craft, which constituted the navy of the little Tabascan republic. The puffing grew louder, the throbbing of the screw, and the rush of the foamy water from the bow struck the ear more clearly, and the outlines of the craft were marked as it rushed past, near the middle of the river, with the starred, triangular flag of Atlamalco wiggling from the staff which upreared itself like a needle from the stern.

In the flood of illumination every part of the vessel was plainly seen: the wheelhouse and even the outlines of the captain at the wheel, the upper deck, the gleam of the one cannon at the front near the pile of wood, and the other at the rear, as well as the forms of several men in sombreros lounging here and there, as if playing the part of sentinels, though there was no earthly call for any service of that nature.

So distinct was everything, that Major Starland saw the Captain reach upward, grasp a cord and pull down. The hoarse throb of the steam whistle awoke the echoes along shore and as it rolled through the forests and jungles caused hundreds of denizens of the solitude to wonder what sort of new beast was coming among them.

Gradually the boat grew hazy and indistinct, but the throbbing of the engine and the soft wash of the current lingered long after the craft itself had faded from view.

"It may be that President Yozarro is afraid President Bambos will forget he has a navy," suggested the American.

"He does not mean to attack him, I am sure."

"He has no cause for doing so, which is generally the reason why these wasps sting their neighbors. If they waited for a just cause there would be eternal peace. Ah, my yacht is not due for several days! I would it were here."

"What would you do, Major?"

"Declare on the side of General Bambos; I shouldn't ask better sport than to blow that crab out of the water."

"Is General Bambos a better friend of yours, Major, than General Yozarro?"

"I count neither as a friend, but Yozarro has my sister as his guest, though she has overstayed her time. I may be wrong, but I am not convinced that she is a willing visitor."

"He holds also the gunboat that we saw pass but a short time ago."

"And I have a yacht with a single gun; with that my crew would make as short work of the *General Yozarro* as we did with the Spanish fleets at Manila and Santiago."

Captain Guzman shrugged his shoulders and smoked in silence.

"My boat will be here in two or three days.

Then I shall ask no help from Bambos or any one else in this part of the world."

"Why not wait, Major? Who knows that if your sister is restored to you through the help of General Bambos, you may not have to ask General Yozarro to help you make *him* give her up?"

It was a contingency of which Major Starland had not thought. Prudence told him to be patient till the coming of the *Warrenia,* with her crew of a dozen men, beside the captain. Three of the crew had fought against Spain and would welcome a scrap with the Atlamalcan navy.

But the American was restless. He carried a pretext for calling upon General Yozarro, and his anxiety would not allow him to remain quiescent. That night as he slept in the hammock which he had brought from his boat and swung in front of the native hut, he heard as in a dream, the puffing of the tug on its return to Atlamalco. He did not rouse himself to look at her, as she glided past in the moonlight, but it was a great relief to know that she had gone back. President Yozarro was so proud of his navy that most of the voyages up and down the Rio Rubio were taken for his

personal pleasure. He would be at home, therefore, on the morrow when his American visitor presented himself.

And such was the case. The forenoon was no more than half gone, when the small sailing craft rounded to at the wharf in front of the native town, and Major Starland leaped ashore. It was agreed that Captain Guzman should await his return to the pier. The alert American noted everything. The tug seemed to be crouching beside the wharf, a hundred feet distant, like a bull dog waiting for some one to venture nigh enough for him to leap forward and bury his fangs in his throat. But no steam was up, and the war craft, like everything else, was adrowse and sleeping.

The city of Atlamalco sprawled over half a square mile, the most ancient dwellings being made of adobe, squat of form and with only a single story. The more pretentious were of a species of bamboo, of large proportions, and, although divided into a number of apartments, they too consisted of but a single story, like most houses in an earthquake country. They were of flimsy make, for the climate was generally oppressive, and the narrow streets

were fitted only for the passage of footmen and animals with their burdens. The swarthy, untidy inhabitants are among the laziest on earth, for, where nature is so lavish, the necessity for laborious toil is wanting. The avenues leading to the wharf slope gently upward, winding in and out, and mingling in seemingly inextricable confusion.

Pen cannot describe the vegetable exuberance of this portion of South America. Sugar, coffee, cocoa, rice, tobacco, maize, wheat, ginger, mandioc, yams, sarsaparilla, and tropical fruits beyond enumeration smother one another in the fierce fight for life. The chief dependence of the people is upon mandioc, manioc, or cassava, which the natives accept as a direct gift from the prophet Sunè. This, however, is not the place to dwell upon the endless variety of trees and the fauna and flora of that extraordinary country.

Major Starland left his rifle in charge of Captain Guzman, and, with his revolver at command, strolled up the main street. The hottest part of the day being near, few of the people were astir or visible. Most of them were asleep within doors, their siesta begin-

ning before the mid-day meal and lasting long afterward.

A single pony came stumbling forward at the first turn of the street, so heaped over with bundles that little more than his head, ears and front legs below the knees were in sight. His driver, swarthy, long-haired, and in sombrero, slouched at the side of the animal, whacking his haunches now and then, swearing at him in mongrel Spanish, to both of which the brute paid no more heed than to the tiny flies that nipped in vain at his armor-like hide.

## CHAPTER VIII.

A FEW paces after the second turn brought the American to the palace of President Yozarro,—a long, low, bamboo structure, standing on slightly rising ground, where it could catch what little air sometimes caressed the town at this time of day. The largest apartment at the rear was the cabinet or council room of the Dictator and President, since the open windows on that side were sure to receive the cool breath of the mountains when it stole through the open windows.

The American officer was fortunate in the time of his call. In the long hall he met two men in uniform, well advanced in years and stooping in an unmilitary way, whom he recognized as the leading officers and counsellors of President Yozarro. It was manifest that they had been holding a conference. The Major saluted them as he passed down the hall to where a guard stood outside the door, musket in hand.

"Will you say to his Excellency that Major Starland desires to speak with him?" asked our friend in excellent Spanish. The Major did not send in his card, for, truth to tell, he had none printed in the language of the country, and he knew the other possessed no knowledge of English.

The guard tapped on the door and disappeared for a minute. When he came back, he held the door open and nodded to the visitor. Major Starland, hat in hand, passed within with brisk, military step, saluted and awaited the pleasure of the President of the Atlamalcan Republic.

The latter was seated behind a large desk at the farther side of the room, smoking a cigarette and facing the visitor. He was of short stature and lacked the protuberant rotundity of President Bambos. Like him his mustache was of glossy blackness and was waxed to needle-like points, but the hair of General Yozarro was cropped and there was a white sprinkling about the temples and behind the ears. This, with the crows' feet and wrinkles, showed that he was fully ten years the senior of his brother President. He was in European dress, his coat, waistcoat and trou-

sers being of spotless white duck, his linen irreproachable, his feet inclosed in patent leathers, and a diamond of eight or ten carats scintillated in his snowy shirt front. He had been heard to boast that this remarkable gem had been taken from the mountains of his own province.

The moment his glittering black eyes rested upon the trim figure of the American he rose and gracefully waved him to a seat on his right. Thanking him for his courtesy, Major Starland walked briskly thither, sat down, crossed his legs, cleared his throat and expressed his pleasure at seeing his distinguished friend looking so well. President Yozarro returned the compliment in the flowery language of his country, and asked the caller to do him the great honor of telling him in what way he could serve him. He assured him that it would be the joy of his heart, if his humble aid would be accepted by one whom he held in such warm friendship and lofty esteem.

While thus overwhelming his caller, President Yozarro snatched up his cigarette box from his desk and held it out to the American, who accepted the courtesy with thanks, lighted

the wisp of fragrant tobacco to which, as we know, he was unaccustomed, and sat back at ease.

"Your Excellency, I come from President Bambos."

"I am delighted to welcome you, and how is my esteemed brother?"

"Never better; when he told me of a slight misunderstanding, I volunteered to lay the matter before you, knowing how willing you would be to listen patiently, and aware too of your deep sense of justice."

"You do me honor, my good friend," replied President Yozarro, bowing and smiling so broadly that his white teeth gleamed through his mustache. "I am eager as always to right any wrong and to correct any misunderstanding."

"Three days ago when your excellent gunboat was at target practice, on the Rio Rubio, one of the shots injured the dwelling of a citizen of Zalapata."

"It grieves me to learn that," replied the President, as if the episode was wholly new to him; "I am impatient to do what I can to repair the carelessness of my gunner: will it

please you to have him shot, as a warning to others to be more careful?"

"By no means; the payment of the slight sum—only forty-two *pesos*—with an expression of regret, will more than satisfy President Bambos."

"I shall hasten to comply with so moderate and just a demand: will you be good enough to convey this statement to my esteemed brother?"

Considering the moderate sum involved, it would seem that President Yozarro might well have closed the incident by passing over the amount to the ambassador, but, since he made no offer to do so, the ambassador could not in common courtesy remind him of it. The Atlamalcan Republic had its own methods and red tape ruled there as elsewhere.

"I am sure that President Bambos could ask nothing more, and I shall take pleasure in repeating your gracious words to him."

President Yozarro bowed, smiled, muttered "*Gracias,*" and lit another cigarette.

"I beg your Excellency that I may have the privilege of a few words with my sister, Miss Starland, who came ashore from my yacht last week to visit her friend Señorita Esta-

cardo, and whom it has not been my pleasure to see since then."

"My good friend makes another request which it shall be my delight to grant," replied President Yozarro, with his bland smile, as he crossed his shapely legs, leaned back and blew the puffs of his cigarette toward the ceiling.

Major Starland felt that he was getting on swimmingly. He had already decided to hand over to President Bambos the amount of the damages for the injury to the property of one of his citizens, quite content to place it to his personal account of profit and loss. Uneasy over the prolonged absence of Miss Starland, he would quickly arrange matters with her during the impending interview.

"I have a pleasant surprise for you," said the President, after his caller had expressed his acknowledgments; "the Señorita made known so warm a wish to see her brother that I hastened to take her, as she and I supposed, to him."

"I do not understand your Excellency."

"She is now at Zalapata, whither she went in our gunboat."

"When?"

"Last night; we must have met on the way, for you could scarcely have made the voyage between the capitals since sunrise."

This remark explained that night trip of the *General Yozarro,* whose going the Major had seen and whose returning he had heard.

"Yes," added his host; "she had but to make known her wish, when she and her friend Señorita Manuela, my niece, became my guests on my gunboat, and were landed at Zalapata last evening, where she will be disappointed to find you absent, though your meeting will be deferred but a short time."

With many acknowledgments, Major Starland bade President Yozarro good bye, passed out into the hall and hurried down the street to the wharf, where Captain Guzman was placidly awaiting him. The same drowsiness that he had noted on his arrival, brooded over everything, and no time was lost in casting off and heading down the river.

But during the absence of the American, the Captain had had a visitor, who did not step ashore, but helped in getting the boat under way, and showed by his action, that he meant to remain with them, if they did not object thereto.

"Who is he?" asked Starland, at the first opportunity to speak privately to his friend.

"Martella, a deserter from President Yo-zarre."

"That won't do, Captain; I cannot permit him to go with us."

"Not so, Major; he is more valuable than you think; he will tell you something you ought to know."

## CHAPTER IX.

THE little craft was fairly under way, and with favoring wind and current, ought to reach Zalapata in the course of ten or twelve hours. Martella, the new recruit, so to speak, seeing there was nothing just then for him to do, sat down at the bow of the boat and smoked his cigarette, while Captain Guzman kept company with Major Starland at the stern.

"Two years ago, when there was war between Atlamalco and Zalapata," explained the native officer, "we captured a party of raiders in the mountains and shot them all excepting one. He was Martella, who, being wounded, was saved at my prayer. Since then we have been friends."

"He ought to be your life friend if there is any such thing as gratitude in his nature."

"I have been to see him and he comes to see me. Martella is one who speaks the truth."

"I was not aware that—barring yourself—

there was any man in this part of the world who had that virtue."

"What did President Yozarro tell you?" asked the Captain so bluntly that the American resented it.

"You have no warrant for asking that question."

"Pardon me, Major; I do not ask to know what he said about the claim of President Bambos, for I already know that."

"You do! Well, what was it?"

"He said he would pay the amount of the claim and asked you to tell President Bambos he is very sorry."

"You are right; that is what he said."

"But he did not pay you the money; and, begging pardon again, Major, you intended to pay it yourself to President Bambos, as if it came from General Yozarro."

"You would be called a mind reader, Captain, in my country, for you are right in everything you say. It will spoil his game, however, if General Bambos is as keen as you."

"If he is, he will not let you discover it; he is determined to go to war against General

Yozarro, and no matter what you do, you cannot prevent it, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"You take away the cause of his making war."

"The cause! You speak in riddles."

Instead of directly replying, the Captain asked the startling question:

"You inquired of General Yozarro about the Señorita, your sister: what answer did he make to you?"

"You have not forgotten the tugboat we saw pass down the river last night; I heard it returning to Atlamalco."

"So also did I."

"On its first voyage, it carried my sister as one of the passengers, she not knowing I had left Zalapata, and she is there awaiting my coming."

Captain Guzman, sitting at the elbow of the American, gazed off toward the wooded plain as if in reverie. His words did not seem to be addressed to any one, but were as if he communed with himself:

"Five hours after the gunboat went up the river, it passed where we were resting on its way back to Atlamalco. The distance from

where we were to Zalapata is eighty miles and to make the trip the boat would need eight or ten hours."

"What the mischief are you driving at? General Yozarro told me he took the lady thither."

Captain Guzman withdrew his gaze from the shore, and looking calmly in the face of Major Starland, said:

"General Yozarro lied."

"How can you know that?"

"Do you not see that the gunboat could not do what he said it did? But Martella here was on the boat and knows all."

"Call him, that I may question him."

"No need of that; I have questioned him; I know that your real business with General Yozarro was to meet the Señorita, your sister, and I know all that Martella knows."

"And what is that?"

"Señoritas Starland and Estacardo were passengers on the boat, but ten miles down the river they went ashore, and, under the escort of two soldiers, set out for the summer home of General Yozarro."

"Where is that?"

"A mile from the river among the moun-

tains; the air there is cooler than at Atlamalco, and General Yozarro spends much of the hot season at *Castillo Descanso*, or "Castle of Rest." Señorita Estacardo is his niece; he is a widower; he loves your sister and he hopes by his kindness and attention to win her for his wife, and to do this, he sees he must keep you and her apart as long as he can."

"The infernal scoundrel! She shall die before wedding him!"

"He knows how you feel: that is why he strives to keep you apart."

"He'll have a good time in doing it! Do you know the path that leads to the summer quarters of this precious dog?"

"Well enough to guide you thither, but Martella knows it better than I."

"Can he be hired to guide us thither?"

"No, for he will do so without pay."

"I shall join General Bambos in his war against Yozarro, and we'll make him pay dear for his deviltry."

"Do you prefer the friendship of General Bambos to that of General Yozarro?"

"I don't care a picayune for either, but I will use one against the other."

"You forget that there is no choice between the good will of the two. When you came up the forked river you first called at Zalapata."

"What of it?"

"General Bambos was a guest on your yacht."

"Yes."

"He met Señorita Starland; he has a wife and several children, but he loves the Señorita as much as does General Yozarro."

"What a couple of wretches! Do you tell me that *that* is why he means to go to war with General Yozzaro?"

"That is his reason; I could not tell you before; his claim for damages is a pretext; he hopes to defeat General Yozarro and to compel him to give up the Señorita. Neither he nor General Yozarro cares for you, whom they regard as an obstacle; they will be glad to put you out of the way."

## CHAPTER X.

ALL this seemed incredible and yet a little reflection convinced Major Starland that the sagacious native was right. The American had two treacherous enemies to meet in the Dictators who professed to be his friends.

"I will go back to Atlamalco; I will call the dog to account; what will he dare say for himself?"

"I am sure," observed the soft-voiced Captain, "that Major Starland will not be so unwise as that."

"Why will it be unwise."

"General Yozarro will not see you when you return."

"He dare not refuse! I will bring up my yacht and lay his counfounded town under tribute."

"He has a gunboat."

"All you folks refer to that tub as a gunboat, when it is only an old tug, which he has

painted over and fitted up with a couple of six-pounders. It is not worth taking into consideration: I will force myself into his presence and compel him to undo what he has done and to beg my pardon on his knees."

The Captain indulged in his expressive shrug and smoked in silence. He was giving the American a few minutes in which to regain his poise. The American did so.

"Why did Martella leave his service?" he abruptly asked.

"General Yozarro caused his brother to be shot, because he ran the gunboat aground the other day. It was upon a mound formed under water one night by the forked river, which no one could see. The boat was not injured, but he shot Martella's brother, who was the pilot. Martella, therefore, hates him."

"No more than I do. Had I known what you have told me when talking with him this forenoon, I should have put a bullet through his carcass."

"There are better ways than that; let us go to the home of General Yozarro in the mountains and bring away the Señorita; Martella will go with us."

"He will be shot as a deserter if taken prisoner."

"He won't be taken prisoner; perhaps, too, he may gain the chance to slay General Yozarro; it will delight his heart if he can do so."

"No more than it will delight mine; talk with him, Captain; if he will help me through with this business, he will never regret it."

Captain Guzman made his way past the sail to the bow where the native was sitting, gazing thoughtfully back over the stream they were leaving behind them. He turned his head as his friend approached, and the two talked in low tones, both seemingly calm, though each was stirred by strong emotion. Then the Captain came back to the American, who, with his hand on the tiller, was holding the boat to her course. He ran in quite close to the southern shore and was studying the Rubio Mountains, whose craggy crests were visible in the sky throughout the whole voyage between the capitals of the republics. He was consumed with resentment that anyone had dared to hold the daughter of an American citizen a guest without her consent,—in other words a prisoner, as if she were a crim-

inal. Manifestly there was a "sovereign remedy" for all this. The great United States Government would not permit the outrage, and any wrong done to one of its people would cost the miserable offender dear.

But the leading Republic of the world lay many leagues to the northward. It would take weeks to bring a naval vessel thence, and certainly a number of days before one could come from the nearest port. Meanwhile, the hours were of measureless value. The Major ground his teeth when he thought he had allowed his yacht to pass down the river to San Luis, with the understanding that she need not return for several days. There was no way, however, of getting word to Captain Winton, who could not suspect the urgent necessity for his presence in this part of the land of abominations.

"Martella will be glad to go with us; he says we should go ashore just this side of the point of land ahead."

"He doesn't seem to have any weapons with him," remarked the Major, scrutinizing the fellow, who was looking at him with a curiously intent expression.

"He could not bring his musket, but he has

a knife under his coat, and none knows better how to use it."

"Bring him here."

Guzman motioned to his friend, who rose to his feet, touching a forefinger to the front of his sombrero, and skilfully picked his course along the careening boat.

"Take the tiller for a few minutes, Captain."

The moment Martella came within reach, the American extended his hand and addressed him in his native tongue:

"The Captain says you are ready to show us the way to *Castillo Descanso,* where Señoritas Estacardo and Starland are staying."

Martella nodded his head several times and said eagerly, "*Si, si, si.*"

"Are you certain they are there?"

"I am not, but I think so."

"The deuce! Captain, I thought you said he was certain."

"So he is,—as certain as one can be; he saw them go ashore last night and start inland under the escort of two soldiers, and heard them say they were going to *Castillo Descanso;* isn't that true, Martella?"

"It is true, but perhaps they did not arrive there."

"Oh, hang it!—that is as near right as one can be. Show the Captain where to direct the boat and we'll soon set things humming."

Martella pointed out the spot, and Guzman, who was an expert navigator, turned the prow inward, while the Major lowered the sail, and they rounded to at a place where all were able to leap ashore dry shod. The craft was carefully made fast, and leaving what slight luggage they had behind, they were ready to press inland without loss of time. The leader carried his rifle and belt full of cartridges and his revolver; the Captain his revolver, while the private was armed only with a long frightful knife, which he kept, so far as possible, out of sight under his jacket.

Standing beside one another for a minute or two, the American asked his guide:

"Did General Yozarro start for this point when he left Atlamalco in his tug?"

"I heard him say he intended to take the Señorita to Zalapata to meet her brother, and Señorita Estacardo went along to bear her company."

"That's what the villain told *me;* did he pass beyond this point?"

"He did so for several miles."

"What cause did he give for turning back?"

"He said war was about to break out between the republics; I heard that much, but I was one of the firemen and could not hear all; he said afterward that he discovered something ahead which caused him to turn back in haste."

"What was it?"

"Nothing, for there was nothing to see."

"He planned it from the first to deceive the Señoritas."

"You speak the truth, but why should he take the pains to do that, when he might have gone overland and made the halt in the mountains?"

It was Captain Guzman who answered:

"Such a journey would have been long and hard for the Señoritas; the voyage is far more pleasant."

"Why did he start at night?"

"It was easier for him to see the danger

which was not there, or for him to make the Señoritas believe he saw it."

"General Yozarro is devilish sly; let us go."

## CHAPTER XI.

SINCE every one in tropical America called Warrenia Rowland by the surname of Major Jack Starland and the two were accepted as brother and sister we will do the same for the present, and thus avoid possible confusion.

These two had been on the Forked River but a short time, when they awoke to a most unpleasant fact, in addition to that which has already been mentioned. While the climate was wholesome enough to those accustomed to it, it was highly dangerous to visitors. The air was damp, oppressive and miasmatic, probably because of the rank vegetation that grew everywhere. Still further, the insect pests were intolerable at times. Several cases of illness among the crew of the yacht, though fortunately none was fatal, alarmed Aunt Cynthia and caused some uneasiness on the part of Major Starland, as well as of Captain Winton. In the circumstances, the

Major felt warranted in urging the plea of business as a legitimate one for haste in leaving the detestable country.

It has been intimated that after Miss Starland had been delivered over to her dearest friend, the yacht dropped down the river to Zalapata, and left Jack there. Captain Winton, who was a cousin of Aunt Cynthia, intended to steam some twenty miles farther eastward to the city of San Luis, where a few needed supplies would be taken aboard. Then the boat would return to Zalapata for its owner, and continue on to Atlamalco, there to receive the young woman for the homeward voyage.

Major Jack Starland was considerate enough to decide to remain most of the time at the capital of General Bambos, knowing the school mates would wish to devote the all too-brief period to each other. Consequently he would only be in the way. The Major gave no specific instructions to Captain Winton, but left much to his discretion. It was intimated to him that he might return to Atlamalco in the course of a few days,—an elastic term which might be halved or doubled without any blame attaching to the skipper.

General Bambos was delighted for the time with the companionship of a man who had received the thorough military training of his visitor. Ignorant as most of the prominent South Americans are, the majority have heard of West Point, and all know something of the courage and achievements of the greatest nation in all the world. The General consulted often with his guest and Major Starland never did, or rather never attempted to do, a more praiseworthy thing than when he strove to impress upon the bulky Dictator the folly and crime of war.

"It was truthfully characterized by our General Sherman as 'hell'; it has been the curse of the ages and brought misery and death to millions, besides turning back the hands on the dial of progress for centuries. Shun it as you would the pestilence that stalks at noonday."

Such discourse is thrown away upon the South American leader to whom revolutions are as the breath of his life. General Bambos blandly smiled and cordially agreed with the wise sentiments, but laid the blame eternally on the other fellow. If *he* would only do that which is just, wars would cease and

blessed peace would brood forever over all nations and peoples.

Major Starland took another tack. There had been hostilities between Zalapata and Atlamalco in the past, with no special advantage accruing to either side. On the whole perhaps the latter Republic had been the gainer, since the last treaty ceded to General Yozarro a small strip of territory on which *Castillo Descanso* stood, the same having been a bone of contention for a long time.

The purchase of a tugboat by General Yozarro had unquestionably tipped the scales in his favor. The American did his best to show Bambos this fact and to warn him that in case of another war between the republics, Zalapata was sure to be the chief sufferer. Bambos could not gainsay this and he was now seeking to balance things, by floating a loan which was to be used in arming his troops with modern weapons. He made a tempting offer to Major Starland to enter his service, agreeing to pay him an enormous salary in gold, though one might well question where he was to obtain a fractional part of it, and to place him in supreme command of the military forces of the Republic.

While the American was illimitably the superior in mentality to the gross Dictator, he failed to perceive an important truth, which did not become clear to him until after his plain talk with Captain Guzman. The great object of the obese nuisance in warring against Yozarro was to place Miss Starland under deep obligations to him, though he was too cunning to intimate anything of that nature. When Jack Starland kindly but firmly declined his offer, he feared that he would become an obstacle to his scheme, and although he hid any such feeling, he would have been glad to have him disappear from the stage of action. What galled Bambos was the fact that the American lady was the guest of his rival, who he knew would do his utmost to woo and win her. To bring to naught anything of that nature, he determined to wage war against Yozarro and shatter the opportunity that fortune had placed in the hands of that detested individual. It cannot be said that the logic of Bambos was of the best, but it must be remembered that the gentle passion plays the mischief with numskulls as well as with men of wisdom.

Such in brief was the situation, when Major

Jack Starland yielded to his growing unrest over the visit of his sister to her friend. He had learned that General Yozarro was a widower—though as in the case of Bambos that would have made little difference in his wayward promptings—and he decided that it would be well to shorten the visit of Miss Starland or to bear her company, so long as she stayed in Atlamalco. He would be welcomed by the young women themselves, and, although Yozarro might wish him to the uttermost parts of the earth, he, too, would be gracious. So the sail of the American and Captain Guzman up the forked river becomes clear to the reader.

Never was mortal man more infatuated with woman than was General Yozarro, from the moment he first laid eyes on the "Flower of the North," as he poetically named her. His passion was too absorbing to be concealed, and in the sanctity of their apartments the niece rallied her friend on the conquest she had made.

"But it is the very one I do not wish to make," protested the annoyed American; "I like General Yozarro, chiefly because he is

your relative, but absolutely my feeling can never go beyond that."

"I thought your heart had not wandered elsewhere."

"It has not, and it can never pass to him, my dear Manuela."

"May I not say that you might go farther and fare worse? He is one of the kindest-hearted of men, is wealthy and would always be your slave."

"You name the very quality I cannot tolerate in the one whom I love; I care nothing for wealth, for I do not need it; I want no man to be my slave, and I shall never marry any one who is not an American like myself."

"But many of your young women marry titles abroad."

"And too often hate themselves afterward for doing so. Misery and wretchedness generally follow, for there is something unnatural in such a union, with nothing of love on either side. Then, too, your uncle is double my age, and it is impossible—utterly impossible for me to return any affection on his part, if it really exists."

"There can be no doubt of *that*," replied the impulsive Atlamalcan, throwing her arms

around her friend and affectionately kissing her. "Be assured I shall never urge you to do anything contrary to your own pure nature. More than that, I shall take the first opportunity to impress upon General Yozarro the hopelessness of any love he may feel toward you."

"That is just like your true self!" exclaimed the American, returning the ardent caresses of her friend; "my stay with you is to be too brief to allow any such cloud to come between us. Much as I hate to cause you distress, Manuela, I shall not stay another day if he persists in forcing his attentions upon me."

"Have no fear of that. He is too good, too considerate, too honorable to bring pain to any one. He will be grieved when I tell him the truth, as I shall lose no time in doing, and will hasten to repair the injustice. So let us kiss again, and say and think no more about it."

True to her promise, Señorita Estacardo took the first occasion to explain frankly the situation to her uncle. He listened thoughtfully, admitted his grief that his new-born hope should be crushed, but declared he would

accept the facts like an honorable man and take every pains that their visitor should not be annoyed in any way by him.

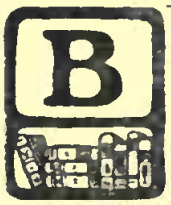
Nothing could have been more delightful than the few days that followed. General Yozarro took his niece and her friend on several voyages down the Rio Rubio, and far enough westward to give her glimpses of the magnificent fauna and flora of that interesting region. There were times when the exuberance of vegetation and foliage, the sweep of the mighty waters, and the superabundance of animal life filled her with awe and a certain fear, but her wonder never abated. The guns on the craft were fired several times for her entertainment, but the General prudently refrained from pointing out the target until he had made sure where the missile had struck, when he found no difficulty in doing so.

No knight of the Crusades could have been more attentive to her slightest wish. Indeed he was so gracious and thoughtful that she felt at times a certain compunction. She wished she could give her affection to one who possessed so many admirable qualities, but

compressing her lips, she shook her head and said again and again: "It can never be."

Now and then spots showed on the sun. She caught glimpses of the volcano-like nature of the man, when some of the crew or his people displeased him. She was horrified to overhear some words which made known the shooting of the brother of Martella for a trifling fault, and she learned, too, of Yozarro's ferocious cruelties to others, including some who had been taken prisoners in honorable warfare. Underneath that suave, smiling exterior lurked Satan himself.

## CHAPTER XII.



UT the fly was still in the ointment. General Yozarro showed in innumerable ways that his passion swayed him more absolutely, if possible, than before. It appeared in the touch of his hand when assisting Miss Starland to mount or alight from her horse on which she rode with her friends through the picturesque country that surrounded the capital,—in the glance of his ardent black eyes, in the sigh which he pretended to try to keep from her, and in the many hints which he dropped of his lonely life since the death of his wife. The young woman could not touch upon these themes, lest he accept it as encouragement; so she contented herself with parrying them. She began to long for the time when she should turn her back upon Atlamalco forever.

On a certain balmy forenoon, General Yozarro, his niece and Miss Starland rode out from the town and over the trail leading into

the Rubio Mountains. They were on their way to *Castillo Descanso,* which had been the cause of much fighting between the republics, and which had finally fallen into the possession of the Dictator of Atlamalco. It was a considerable way in the mountains and stood upon an elevation that brought it out in clear view from the capital.

"It is fully three centuries old," explained Señorita Estacardo to her friend, "and is unlike anything I have ever seen in this part of the world. I suppose there are plenty of similar buildings along the Rhine and perhaps on your own Hudson, which has been called the Rhine of America."

"How came it to be built?"

"I can only repeat the legends that have come down to us. Some great pirate or general of Spain or Portugal—I don't know which—came up the river in quest of gold mines of which he had heard stories from the natives. You know that the first Spaniards who crossed the ocean to our continent cared more for gold than any or everything else, and stopped at no crimes to obtain it."

"That was the case with many other nations."

"Well, this buccaneer landed his crew here and tramped inland to the mountains, where the gold was reported to be. He took with him several hundred native prisoners to work the mines. He is said to have been very successful, and while his slaves were digging in the mountains, he set many others to work building him a home.

"Oh, there was no element of romance lacking, for he brought with him a young and beautiful bride and it was for her that the Castle was built. He must have learned from Columbus, Balboa, Pizarro and the other early explorers that the worm sometimes turns and that it was wise for him to make his position safe against any revolt of the Indians. So the house which you are about to visit was put up. It is of solid stone and three stories high,—something almost unknown in an earthquake country like ours."

"But what became of this fine old gentleman?"

"I declare I forgot that. He lived there for years and then found that the danger against which he had made such full preparations was not the one that threatened him. The natives did not revolt, though why they

did not I do not understand, for he treated them like beasts of burden and killed many in mere wantonness. It was his own men who rose against him. They had gathered a great deal of gold, but grew homesick. They hated the country and begged him again and again to leave or allow them to go, since they had enough wealth for all. He swore that not one should depart till the store of gold was increased ten-fold. Then, and not until then, would he weigh anchor, spread sail and pass down the river to the ocean and so homeward.

"Well, although I suppose the men were able to gather more gold, it is not to be supposed they could have gotten as much as he wished. So they took the shortest way to close up the business. They killed the captain and his bride, carried aboard ship all the wealth they had collected, set sail and passed out from further chronicle. What do you think of the story, Warrenia?"

"It has the true flavor and makes me anxious to look through the Castle."

General Yozarro, who was riding in advance along the narrow trail, and listening to the words of his niece at the rear, called over his shoulder:

"That privilege shall be yours in a brief time, Miss Starland; I am glad you are interested."

"How could any one help it? Is the Castle yours, General?"

"Yes; it may be said to be a part of the spoils of war. The boundary line between Atlamalco and Zalapata runs through these mountains, but its precise course has never been defined. The Castle rightfully belonged to Atlamalco, but General Bambos claimed that it stood on his territory. Since he was deaf to argument and reason nothing remained but to refer it to the arbitrament of arms, with the result that General Bambos is quite sure not to open the dispute again."

"Did those visitors of the long ago take away all the gold in the mountains?"

"That is quite impossible."

"Why do *you* not dig or mine for what is left?"

"I have thought of that, but it seems wise to wait until I gain some one to share my lonely life with me."

"Would it not be more considerate to finish the work before that time, so that you both will be at leisure to enjoy it? How much

better than waging war with your neighbors!"

"I have sufficient gold for me and mine. You mean it would be better for my neighbors to refrain from waging war against me. I made a religious vow long since never to go to war except in the defence of my rights, and that you know is one's solemn duty."

It was the same old argument that General Bambos had used in discussing the question with Major Jack Starland.

The young woman made no reply, for she saw it would be useless, and her escort added:

"Your counsel is good, Miss Starland, but suppose General Bambos should construe such action on my part as unfriendly?"

"Surely he cannot do so, unless you enter his territory, and that I am sure you have no thought of doing."

"You know not the perfidy of that man," was the commentary of the Dictator, his words inspired by jealousy.

When the Castle of Rest was reached it justified all that Señorita Estacardo had said of it, though it lacked moat and drawbridge and the other feudal accessories. It was of massive rock and stone, sixty or more feet in

length and almost as broad. The lowest floor consisted of two large rooms, with broad openings instead of doors, rough and unfurnished and with walls several feet in thickness. At the time of its building, it would have resisted any armament that could have been brought to bear against it. The crevices between the stones throughout the structure had been filled with clay or adobe, which in the course of centuries had hardened to the consistency of rock itself. The second and third stories contained each four apartments, whose walls were of less thickness, but the whole constituted a veritable Gibraltar. Sloping stone steps connected each story, but only the rooms of the second contained anything in the nature of furniture.

It was evident that General Yozarro had given this portion recent attention, for the windows, tall, narrow and paneless, had been screened by netting with the finest of meshes, though none can be fine enough to wholly exclude the infinitesimal insects like the coloradilla, or red flea, whose bite is as the point of a red hot needle, the sand fly, and other devilish insects beyond enumeration. Matting was spread on the smooth stone floors,

there were imported chairs of costly make, stands, a bureau and much of what constitutes the appointments of a modern residence in a tropical country. The doors were made of a species of wood, beautifully carved, but showing no effects of the tooth of time, except in the gray faded color, for paint had never touched them. They were powerful enough to defy a battering ram, fitted with enormous locks and heavy bars that could be slipped into the massive iron receptacles.

"Had that old buccaneer been given notice of the attack by his men," said Miss Starland, when the building had been inspected from top to bottom, "he might have shut himself in one of these rooms and bade them do their worst."

"Perhaps he did," suggested General Yozarro.

"And yet the legend says he fell."

"Starvation and thirst are enemies to whom the bravest must surrender."

"It looks, General, as if you had been rejuvenating this fine old Castle."

"I have done so to a certain extent in honor of your coming. Besides I thought my niece

would find a stay here pleasant during the oppressive weather and I prepared it partly for her. You observe how much cooler it is here than in the capital."

## CHAPTER XIII.

ALL had observed this fact which was natural. The elevation of the structure, which was open to every breeze that fluttered through the mountains, made it one of the most comfortable places in that part of the world. Another thing had been noted by the young women. Two armed sentinels were pacing outside, and two more came forward from the lower apartments and saluted the General and his party. They relieved one another at regular intervals, and three of them had their wives domiciled on the second floor. These were slatterns, not wholly lacking in a certain comeliness, and eyed the visitors with shy curiosity. The latter spoke to them in Spanish, to which they smiled and replied in soft, awed monosyllables, and respectfully watched the movements of the young women.

General Yozarro descended the lower stairs, leaving his young friends on the second floor,

where they lingered a few minutes to admire the view from the windows. The broad, wooded plain, stretching to the verge of vision, the town nestling in the lowlands a few miles away, the sweep of the river, and the cloudless blue sky formed a picture that would always linger in the memory of all whose privilege it was to look upon them.

The two turned to descend the steps, when the Señorita missed one of her gloves. Hurriedly glancing about her, she said:

"I must have dropped it in the story above; I'll run up and search, while you may find it below or on the outside."

She darted off like a bird, and Miss Starland moved down the sloping steps which gave back not the slightest sound. The female servants had preceded her, so that for a brief time she was alone. She reached the lower floor, and was passing through the opening leading out doors, when she heard some one speaking in a low, but excited voice. She paused and discovered that he was swearing frightfully, the passion of the speaker being the more fearful because of the repression of the tones. With a shock which cannot be described, she recognized the voice as Gen-

eral Yozarro's, and, more shameful than all, he was addressing one of the women.

In her distress, and determined not to hear the words, Miss Starland softly ran up the steps and was looking through the rooms again for the missing glove, when her friend, with a glowing smile, came down holding it up in her hand. Both laughed over the insignificant incident, and Miss Starland took care as they descended that her own merriment continued. General Yozarro, thus warned, finished his imprecations, and met them with his usual smiles and graciousness. In his snowy suit, sombrero in hand, he was the acme of cool politeness and courtesy. Had not Miss Starland identified his voice unmistakably, she could not have believed what her ears had told her.

That one revelation, however, did its work. She was resolved to leave Atlamalco on the first opportunity and never to set foot within the Republic again. She had come to look upon this man with a mortal horror, for, under the mask of chivalry, he carried the blackest of hearts.

The return ride was trying to the last degree. General Yozarro seemed to have for-

gotten his promise to his niece, and tortured her friend with attentions which filled her with resentment. When he assisted her to dismount, he pressed her hand for an instant until the rings on her fingers dented the flesh and almost caused her to cry out with pain. He uttered endearing expressions in a voice so low that no ears except those for which they were intended heard them, and they gave no heed. Her friend seemed to see nothing of all this, though she must have been aware of it.

The irrepressible lover, more hopelessly enmeshed than ever, insisted upon their visitor sitting with him and his niece on the piazza in the moonlight, but in desperation, she pleaded a headache—when she had never suffered therefrom—and kept her room.

"And Jack never dreams of anything of this kind," was her thought; "he is only a few miles away, and I shall insist that I be taken to him on the morrow."

Having made her resolution, she carried it out. At the table, which was set in the large back room of General Yozarro's city house, and provided with the choicest fruits and every delicacy that the fertile republic could

furnish, she made known her wish. She longed to see her brother on an important matter, and begged that she might be taken to him with the least possible delay. The others expressed their regret, and the General offered to send for her relative.

"The one who goes to take the message can as well take me along," said she, determined to force the point.

"Do you expect to remain with him long?" inquired the General.

"I know of nothing to prevent our coming back quite soon."

"Your wish is my command; I shall be very busy to-day on important matters. Suppose we take the ride to Zalapata on my gunboat this evening?"

"That will be delightful!" exclaimed the niece, and though it was not the exact arrangement her friend wished, she could offer no objection and it was so agreed.

Thus it came to pass that the *General Yozarro* steamed past Major Jack Starland and Captain Guzman, while the two sat smoking in front of the native's hut on the northern shore of the Rio Rubio, without either party suspecting how near they were to each other.

The long day gave General Yozarro abundant time to perfect his schemes which were carried out with precision and a faultless nicety of detail.

Two miles beyond the hut, while the young women were partaking of refreshments in the Captain's room, which had been specially fitted for their reception, he came to them in great agitation.

"I have just discovered that General Bambos has obtained a boat somewhere and is descending the river with the undoubted purpose of attacking Atlamalco."

"Let us hasten back ahead of him," said his startled niece, who like her friend was in dismay over the tidings.

"It will never do to flee before him; he must be kept from reaching our capital; a battle with him is a necessity."

"With us on board?"

"I do not see how it can be helped—but hold! I will land you here and send you to *Castillo Descanso*, where you will be beyond all harm. Ah! that is it! That is it!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE tug rounded to and approached the shore so close that by running out the gang-plank, the young women were readily assisted to land. They were nervously eager, for there was no saying when the hostile craft would appear and open fire, since its crew and leader must be unaware of the presence of the non-combatants.

General Yozarro could not have been more thoughtful. He was profuse in his regrets because it was necessary to subject them to this inconvenience, and he assured both over and over again that everything would be done for their comfort.

"You know the Castle is prepared for your stay, which I hope will be brief; I shall see that nothing is neglected and you will hear from me tomorrow."

The three were standing for a minute or two on the bank, having but little luggage to

take with them, since, when they left Atlamalco nothing like this had been dreamed of by the two.

"But, General," said the Señorita, "it is a mile to the Castle; how are we to reach there alone and at night?"

Before he answered, two men came silently out of the gloomy wood. They were in the uniform of soldiers, and one of them, saluting, said:

"General, we have the horses saddled and waiting."

"That is fortunate; I will assist you to mount."

This time he did not press the hand of Miss Starland, when with his slight help, she vaulted into the saddle, nor did he sigh or give expression to anything sentimental. The time was too critical for anything like that. He waved them farewell, hurried aboard over the plank, which was quickly drawn in, and the screw of the tugboat began churning the muddy water, as she circled slowly about and headed up stream.

The young women, being mounted, looked apprehensively out over the moonlit stream, expecting and dreading the coming of the

other boat which was to fire the opening gun of another senseless and vicious conflict between the peppery republics. The situation, however, was too dangerous for them to wait more than a few minutes, and one of the soldiers, doffing his sombrero, spoke with the utmost deference:

"I will lead the way and your horse will follow. My comrade will walk at the rear; be assured there is no danger."

Each man carried a musket and the one who had spoken turned inland. The horse of the American followed, the gait of all being the ordinary walk. The Señorita was only a few steps behind her, while the second soldier silently stalked at the rear. The American noticed that they were following a clearly marked path or trail, which soon began descending, then climbed upward, and wound around and between rocks, the gloom in some places being so deep that she caught only shadowy glimpses of the guide in front, as he plodded onward like one familiar with his course. At times there were openings where the light was like that at midday. She might well have trembled had not her animal been sure-footed, for they had penetrated no more

than a few hundred yards, when the little procession began threading along the face of a mass of rocks, where the path was so narrow that she felt the swish of her skirts against the mountain wall, and on her right it sloped downward perpendicularly, until what seemed a bottomless pit was hidden in a pool of gloom. A misstep by any member of the party would have sent him or her to instant destruction. But the animals and men moved confidently, though the pace was slow. Evidently, with the exception of the women, all were familiar, not only with this method of traveling, but with this particular route.

As soon as our friends had become accustomed to the work, the thoughts of both reverted to the river, and they listened with shrinking foreboding for the sound of the guns that would mark the opening of the fight between the two craft. General Yozarro had declared that he would not permit the boat of his enemy to reach the capital, and he intimated that as soon as he was released from the care of the ladies, he would be quick to open the naval battle.

"He steamed up stream," reflected Miss Starland, "but he will not go far; he is seek-

ing a favorable position near by and the conflict will be a fierce one."

But the minutes passed and the silence was unbroken. Naught but the myriad voices of the jungle thrummed into her ears and she found herself wondering what the explanation of the continued silence could be. Had General Yozarro changed his mind and hastened to his capital, with the decision to offer defence there? She could not believe it. It seemed more probable that he had hurried down the river toward Zalapata to meet his antagonist, who may have turned and fled to his own town. Even this looked unlikely, but it was the only explanation that presented itself. She would have liked to converse with her friend, but the circumstances were unfavorable. The continual shifting of conditions compelled her to keep a firm seat and rein and to watch every step of her horse.

As the minutes passed and they penetrated farther into the interior, without hearing the boom of the gun, a disquieting question forced itself upon her. How did it come about that when she and her friend were put ashore, two soldiers were awaiting them, with properly saddled animals? It could not have been acci-

dent or coincidence. They must have been there by order of General Yozarro, who intended from the first that the landing should be made. No other theory was reasonable. Had any doubt lingered, it would have been removed by the silence of the armed craft.

This question inevitably suggested the other as to the reason why General Yozarro had adopted so extraordinary a policy. Had he wished to send the two to the Castle, there was not the shadow of a difficulty in doing so, by the simplest and most direct means. As we know, they had already visited the gloomy building and would not have hesitated to accompany him again. Why all this mystery of landing them from the boat at night and sending them into the mountains in charge of two of his soldiers?

The thoughts that thronged upon the American were too perplexing for solution, and she resolutely put them away for a more convenient season. When she and her comrade could sit down and talk in quietude, they might formulate the explanation which at present was beyond reach.

One resolution, however, had crystallized: she would lose no time or opportunity in get-

ting beyond the domain of General Yozarro and would never again willingly enter it. She had had more than enough of Zalapata as well as Atlamalco, and yearned for the return of Jack's yacht, when they could flit from a country which she had come to detest unutterably. She dearly loved Manuela and could not reconcile herself to the thought of losing her companionship forever; but from this time forward, the American must voyage to the country which had been her home for years, and where she could be assured of respectful treatment.

## CHAPTER XV.

SUDDENLY her plodding pony stood still, with a slight neigh and ears erect. They were at that moment winding around the face of a precipice, with the wall on the left rising to a height of a hundred feet or more, and sloping downward on the right into a gorge of Stygian blackness. The path was a yard or over in width, so there was plenty of foothold, and the halt could not be due to any lack of that nature.

The guide was motionless, a dozen paces in advance. Something seemed to have caught his notice and caused him to hesitate. Peering beyond his head in the vivid moonlight, Miss Starland discerned a crouching form, lithe and sinewy, and resembling a huge hound. It had been approaching from the opposite direction, when it was checked by sight of the man. A growl pierced the stillness, as it stood lashing its sides with its long

tail. Then it began inching forward with intent to attack the obstacle in its path. The latter maintained his stationary pose, but at sight of the beast stealthily creeping upon him, he raised his gun to his shoulder, took a quick aim and fired.

The space was short and the shot sped true. Upon receiving the bullet, the beast emitted a rasping screech and leaped directly upward, as if impelled from a springboard, and falling on its side, rolled over the edge of the precipice, down which it sped, clawing, snarling and bringing the loose dirt streaming after it, until it vanished in the gloomy depths and all became as it was before.

The soldier coolly reloaded his gun, without stirring from his position, turned his head and said in a conversational tone: "Come on; all is well." Then he resumed his walk, and the pony of Miss Starland, as if all had been clear to him from the first, plodded onward.

"Do you know what that animal was?" called the Señorita from the rear.

"How should I know anything about him?"

"It was a jaguar."

"Said to be one of the most dangerous animals of your country."

"I hope you have no fear of that particular one."

"No, but there must be others."

"They are not plentiful in these mountains; at any rate, the guide will take good care of you."

A few minutes later, the procession began descending the trail, which broadened and was partly hidden by undergrowth and trees, that lined the sides and overshadowed the party at intervals. Several times Miss Starland had heard an odd chattering, which she could not identify, but which did not disturb the others. This showed that the soldiers understood and so long as that was the case, she need not be disturbed in mind.

In the lowest part of the valley-like depression, where she could catch only dim glimpses of her guide, she was dreadfully startled by an object alighting like a feather on her horse directly in front. It was so close that she instantly saw it was a monkey, which in pure mischief had dropped from one of the branches and perched itself on the shoulders of the pony. Looking round at her it chattered and seemed on the point of climbing upon her head when she struck it so sharp a

cuff that it toppled over sideways from the horse upon the trail, down which it went clawing and chattering its anger; but, though it dropped from sight, it must be believed it suffered no harm, because of its own nimbleness.

Her friend saw enough to understand what had taken place and called out:

"I hope you are not frightened, Warrenia; the little fellow meant no harm."

"But I do not wish his company; you are welcome to it."

"I care little either way, but they are revengeful, and when you cuff the next one's ears, don't do it too hard, or it may rouse the others to attack you; heigho! here's another!" exclaimed the Señorita, as one of the agile creatures bounded from somewhere upon her horse and whisked out of sight again.

A soft murmur stole through the night, and gradually increased in depth of volume, until when the party rounded a bend in the trail, they came upon the cause. To the right and a hundred feet above them, a sheet of crystalline water poured over the edge of the rocks and tumbled into the valley below, whence it

wound its course to the Rio Rubio, only a short distance away. The falls were twenty feet in width, with a descent perhaps twice as great, and in the moonlight they looked like a motionless sheen of silver, which might have been believed to be the case but for the churning of the snowy foam below. From this a fleecy mist was continually ascending, and a little way above, it displayed a faint rainbow, whose exquisitely delicate beauty caused an exclamation of delight from the visitor who saw the picture for the first time in her life.

But to the escort it was a familiar sight, and they gave it only a glance, as they trudged onward. They were unemotional automata, who knew nothing except to obey the orders of their terrible chief. He had commanded them to give safe conduct to the young women to the Castle, and that was their sole task. So far as the American was aware, not a word had been spoken by the man at the rear, and the guide opened his lips only when necessary.

Several times while pressing over the trail, they had caught sight of the stone structure, and noted the twinkling of the lights from the upper story. Making another turn, and

climbing a slight ascent, they came to the small plateau on which it stood, only a few rods in advance.

Proof again appeared that this journey had been pre-arranged. Instead of two guards, some eight or ten men were patrolling and lounging on the outside of the grim building. One of these came forward and spoke for several minutes, in low tones, with the guide. A call was made to the man at the rear and he advanced and took part in the conversation.

The ponies halted of their own accord. While Miss Starland was waiting and wondering, her friend dropped lightly from the saddle and came to her side.

"Give me your hand, Warrenia; we are done riding for to-night."

The next moment the two young women stood beside each other on the ground. Naturally the Señorita took charge of her guest and led the way through the broad opening to the lower part of the Castle, where a native woman was standing. Manuela recognized her as a servant of her uncle's household, and addressed her by name. She replied that

their apartment was ready and conducted the two into the lower division of the building, which was dimly lit up by a lamp fastened to a bracket in the wall. Still under the lead of Juanita, as she was called, the couple passed up the steps to the principal apartment, which they had inspected the day before.

"You will wish to be together," said the servant with a broad smile, "and this is your home, so long as you honor the Castle with your company."

"Yes, we shall stay together," the Señorita hastened to say, slipping her arm under that of her friend, who pressed it affectionately. "You may leave us now, Juanita, and when we want you, we will call."

The apartment was the one that had been provided with conveniences and appointments, such as two young ladies were likely to need, even to the little knick-knacks that are considered indispensable by them. A glance around the room, in the mellow light of the lamp on the mantel, showed nothing lacking.

"It seems to have been specially prepared for us," said the Señorita.

"And that, my dear friend, is the one thing that troubles me; I do not understand it; do you?"

## CHAPTER XVI.

SENORITA ESTACARDO drew her chair beside the snowy couch and faced her friend, who did the same regarding her. Reaching out her hand, she lovingly inclosed that of Miss Starland, just as she used to do in the dear old days at the Seminary. The American young woman leaned forward and kissed the dark cheek, and for a minute they sat without speaking. Then with the black eyes gazing into the blue ones, the owner of the former said in a voice, scarcely above a whisper:

"Warrenia, I do not understand it."

"And, Manuela, I'm afraid I do."

"Tell me, then."

"Surely you have a suspicion. Why should we mince matters? He has forgotten his pledge to you and is more resolute than before."

"I fear you are right. The thought has been growing upon me ever since we left the boat. Need I tell you that you are no more shocked and grieved than I?"

"No, nothing that mind can conceive will ever throw a shadow upon your loyalty and goodness. I have known you too long and too well for me to have room for such an injustice."

The other's answer to this was to throw her arms impulsively around the neck of her friend and to kiss her again and again, murmuring:

"Thank you and bless you! I can never be the angel that you are and I would gladly die for you."

There were no tears in the eyes of either; they were too brave for that. It was the American who spoke when they became more composed:

"We are agreed upon the one thing, and, therefore, must be right. But you can aid me to clear up several points that trouble me. Why did General Yozarro put us ashore and send us here?"

"I suspect his reason for that. You know he has spoken of sending us to the Castle to spend a few days of the hot weather. He had the preparations made and this room fitted for us. We should have come here today, but for your change of mind. You de-

manded to go to Zalapata and he could not refuse. His plan that you should come to the Castle was not changed, but he had to seem to defer to your wishes. To have come directly here would have been a plain disregard of them, so he spent the day in planning this deception, and carried it out without the least difficulty."

"Must he not have seen that when we went ashore and found the escort waiting with ponies, we should see that the whole thing was pre-arranged? In no other way could it have come about."

"True, but when we understood it all it would be too late to do us any good."

"What of his story that General Bambos had sent a boat up the river to attack Atlamalco?"

"It was pure invention."

"We certainly have heard no sounds of a battle between the boats."

"Because there has been none. He saw no more of a hostile fleet than did we, for none exists; he has gone back to Atlamalco."

"I suppose he will be here tomorrow with some cunning falsehood to explain why the conflict did not take place. He will say he

gave chase to the enemy, who fled without firing a shot, but how can I pretend to believe him?"

"There is no call for any such pretense. If he tries further deception, ask him to make clear how the two soldiers were waiting on shore with horses. If he makes a reasonable explanation of that, he has more ingenuity than I ever supposed."

"We can have no trouble in convicting him, but, Manuela, my dread is that it will not help matters, but rather make them worse. I must confess that his conduct is beyond my comprehension."

"It is not beyond mine."

"What is your theory?"

"It is not a theory but a fact. My uncle is so hopelessly in love with you that his ordinary common sense has left him."

"It may be as you say, but much remains that is unaccountable to me."

"I see little that is not made clear by what I have said. You and I know that when a man becomes as blindly infatuated as he, his conduct violates reason and the simplest prudence and he does things that would be absurd in a child. Frightened by the prospect of

losing you, he gave all his thoughts and energies to preventing it. This was the only method that suggested itself, and we cannot deny, my dear friend, that it has been quite successful up to this point."

"But of what possible avail can it be to him? Idiot that he is, he must know that this situation can last but a short time. Jack will find it out within twenty-four hours, and General Yozarro must know what will happen *then*."

"Dearest Warrenia, you do not see as much in this as I. What stronger proof can I give of my love to you than to say that we must separate and you must leave this part of the world with the least possible delay? Your own loveliness is your peril. It ought to be your greatest protection, but it is not. I would that your yacht was in the river this very hour and that we could make haste to it, for you are in greater danger than you suspect."

## CHAPTER XVII.

THE cheek of the American blanched, and she looked earnestly at her friend, as if she did not take in the full meaning of her words. She spoke in a whisper:

"Tell me what you mean."

The other rose from her chair, walked across the room to the closed door, and turned the big key in the massive lock. Then she lifted the ponderous bar and dropped it into place."

"It may not be necessary," she said, as she came back, sat down and took the hand which she had released; "for though some of the servants may be in the next room, or in the hall outside, none can hear what we say. It will do no harm, however, to be certain. If you could have your wish you would be in Zalapata tonight?"

"Most assuredly I should."

"Because the Major is there, but if he

chanced to be away, your situation would be no better than at Atlamalco."

"I am certain it would be a thousand-fold better."

"I am afraid, dear friend from the North, that I see some things clearer than you; General Bambos is just as much infatuated with your loveliness as General Yozarro."

"But he has a wife and family!" was the horrified exclamation of Miss Starland.

"That makes not the slightest difference to him."

An expression of unutterable scorn darkened the face of the American.

"Impossible as it seems, Manuela, I must believe you. How can you live here?" she asked with impulsive disgust; "you cannot trust *any* man in this country."

"Ah, my dear Warrenia, they are not all alike; I certainly know *one* who is different from the two we have been talking about."

And the dark countenance became delightfully darker, and was aglow with the radiance of perfect love and trust.

"I am glad to assure you I believe every word you say; I forgot Captain Ramon Ortega, the brave officer and faultless gentle-

man, whose greatest good fortune is to come when he wins you."

"And his good fortune will be no greater than mine; but, Warrenia, to leave the most winsome of subjects for the most hateful, you will be safer at Zalapata with Major Jack, but neither of you will be secure until you are on the yacht and beyond reach of General Bambos, as well as of General Yozarro. I could almost advise you to wait here, and yet something whispers it will not do."

"But how am I to leave? It will not do to attempt the journey alone to Zalapata, and what way is there of sending word thither?"

"Why shall we not have our ponies brought up and ride direct to the capital? They are here already, with proper saddles. We can start tomorrow after breaking fast, and we should reach the capital by nightfall."

"Do you know the route?"

"As well as the walks around the old Seminary, where we spent the happiest days of our lives; I have gone over it many times in my girlhood and have done so since coming home."

"Neither of us carries any firearms and we must face danger."

"I was never in any danger, though I suppose there must be more or less of it. I shouldn't like to meet a jaguar, tiger cat or zaratu, but we might do so without any harm coming to us."

"What of the serpents?"

"The big ones are near the streams and in the marshy country; we have a few coral snakes with their black heads and ringed bodies, but we are as safe from them without as with firearms. This part of the world is not so much infested as others. If I have no hesitation in making the venture should you feel any?"

"I do not; shall we take an escort?"

"It would seem we ought to do so, but I believe it best to have none."

"For what reason?"

"They would be soldiers of General Yozarro."

The significance of these words was not lost upon the other, who hastened to say:

"Let us go alone."

They sat communing until the night was far advanced. Their plans for the morrow may be summarized in what has been stated. Both believed that no special risk would be

run in venturing upon a journey of something more than twenty miles by daylight, without firearms or escort. As a rule, strangers had little to fear in passing through any section of either republic, and there were several native huts along the trail, where the Señorita had obtained refreshment and secured lodging on some of the journeys that were begun too late in the day to be completed before nightfall. Although she was always in the company of others, it was not on account of any misgiving or fear on her part.

Very rarely or never was a wheeled vehicle seen either in Zalapata or Atlamalco, and the connecting roads were naturally no more than simple trails; but all of these were so clearly marked that there was no cause for even a stranger losing his way. While the bifurcation of the river made the water communication between the republics more convenient, many preferred the overland journey. The ride through the craggy mountains, whose width may be roughly given as less than half a dozen miles, was romantic and easy enough when made on the back of a horse.

The strange, disturbing situation in which Miss Starland found herself kept her awake

long after the gentle breathing of her friend at her side told her she was unconscious. The conditions were so singular and so alarming that at times she was mystified and doubted the wisdom of the course they had decided upon. She could not believe that the path was as free from danger as the Señorita supposed. None the less, she was resolved to make the venture. There was one comforting feature about it all: if they were followed and brought back under some pretext by the soldiers of General Yozarro, no unpleasant consequences would result therefrom to them. The man would be ready with some plausible justification of his course, but would be as effusive in his courtesy as ever. Finally the sorely troubled one slept.

Neither awoke until the sunlight streamed through the narrow windows, and then the two were roused by the knocking on the outer door, and the call of Juanita that she was waiting with their food. She was admitted and the meal on the broad silver tray was set on the stand in the middle of the apartment. Nothing could have been more appetizing, in that smothering climate, consisting as it did wholly of fruit, and delicious cocoa, includ-

ing prepared rice, mandioc and cassava, the last being the most popular food in that part of the world.

Juanita having left the meal, courtesied, called down the blessings of the saints upon the visitors, and, assuring them that it would be her happiness to come whenever wanted and to act the part of slave all her life to them, went away, and once more our friends were alone. The Señorita did not fasten the door, for there was no call to do so, and in due time, the two drew up their chairs and partook of the food with the zest of youth and health. There was abundance for both and they fully enjoyed it. By and by, Juanita returned and removed the remains of the repast.

Miss Starland walked to each of the narrow windows in turn and gazed out over the surrounding country. One of the openings gave a view of the Rio Rubio, as it wound to the eastward, until its reunion and onward flow to the Atlantic. She descried a catboat leaning far over and skimming up stream toward Atlamalco, and a canoe, in which were two natives, was observed, as one of the occupants swung his paddle like an American Indian and

drove the tiny craft toward the northern shore. But as her vision roved up and down the river, she failed to see that for which she longed above everything else. The yacht which had brought her to this part of the world was still absent. In neither direction could she catch a glimpse of Atlamalco or Zalapata. The other window opened to the south, or toward the mountains, where the view had no interest for her.

As she had done before, she remarked upon the massiveness of the walls and the straitness of the window openings.

"They are so narrow that we could not force ourselves through."

"Our old buccaneer friend must have had them made thus on purpose. Suppose some of those who hated him—which means all the others—should have become strong enough to clamber up the walls on the outside,—was it not well to make it impossible for them to enter the Castle?"

The matter, however, was of slight interest to our friends and they hurried their preparations for the journey. The Señorita donned her hat and led the way down the steps to the outside. To both it looked as if the number

of guards had been increased during the night, for more than a dozen were in sight, without regarding those who had lain down to rest. The young women were saluted by all as they appeared, and the soldiers whom they recognized as their escort of the night before, came forward to learn their wishes.

"Carlos, the ponies that brought us here are still with you?"

"They are, Señorita."

"Have them saddled and brought out; we are to ride to Zalapata today, and wish to make an early start."

The man removed his hat, bowed and spoke with the utmost respect:

"I am grieved not to hasten to comply with your commands; but we have orders from General Yozarro that the señoritas are to remain here till he comes, which will be in a few hours, I think. It fills my heart with sorrow, but as a soldier, the Señorita knows that no choice is left to me."

And this time, he made two obesiances,—one for each of the dumfounded young women.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

THE two looked at each other in speechless amaze. This was a direct interference with their personal freedom, the first either had known.

The Señorita was the first to find speech. Addressing the soldier, she said:

"You say this is the order of General Yozarro?"

"Were it not, I should not dare utter the words."

"What is his reason for the command?"

It was essentially a feminine question, but the soldier did not hesitate with the reply:

"War impends between Zalapata and Atlamalco; we are expecting at almost any hour an attack upon *Castillo Descanso;* the Señorita observes the armed force that has been placed here by General Yozarro; he cannot allow the señoritas the danger of falling into the hands of the perfidious General Bambos and his barbarians."

It was on the tongue of Miss Starland to declare that she would prefer a hundred times that eventuality to remaining in charge of the Atlamalcans, but instead, her companion said what was in the minds of both:

"The order of General Yozarro may apply to me, but cannot apply to my friend who owes no allegiance to Atlamalco or Zalapata. She comes from the Great Republic of the North, and no one elsewhere has the right to say yea or nay to her."

"It distresses me very much, Señorita Estacardo, that special weight was laid by General Yozarro upon the order as affecting la Americana."

And looking toward the latter, he again removed his hat and bowed low, instead of contenting himself with the military salute that would have been the proper thing under the circumstances. The soldier was above the ordinary native in intelligence.

His words showed the futility of further argument. Without a word, but throwing back her head with a scornful gesture, the Señorita nodded to her friend to accompany her back into the gloomy building. Silently and slowly the two went up the sloping stone

steps and re-entered the room which they had left a few minutes before. The Señorita locked the door and the two faced each other.

"What do you make of it, Manuela?"

"Only one thing can be made of it; it is as I said; General Yozarro is determined you shall remain here for some time to come and he gives no more thought to the foolhardiness of his action than if he were a child too young to walk."

"What of the story of a war between the republics?"

"I do not believe a word of it."

"Meantime, what are we to do?"

"Sit down, fold our hands and be good; but," she added with a flash of her eyes, "that is the last thing to do; I long to meet my uncle face to face. It is the first time he ever offered such an insult to the daughter of his dead sister and to her friend. I hope he will not delay his coming."

"I wish to be present when you meet; I, too, shall have something to say, which I do not think he will soon forget."

But the hours wore slowly away and General Yozarro came not. Was he not shrinking from her whose fiery temper he well knew?

Which of the two did he fear the most? The northerner may have been of cooler blood, but her anger, when once set aflame, was all the more profound. She abominated the man with his sleek smile, his oily manner and his tempestuous profanity when he thought himself beyond her hearing. She could not think that the other Dictator, with all his stupidity and grossness, was one-half as wicked as he. Were she free to do so, she would not hesitate to throw herself upon his protection.

"Where can Jack be?" she asked after the mid-day repast, and when the two had talked over every phase of the situation for the twentieth time. "Surely he must soon learn of this and he will be quick to call General Yozarro to account."

"I place little hope on that; do not forget, my dear Warrenia, that the Major is only one man against hundreds."

"But what of the yacht?"

"It is many miles away; no one can say when it will return; remember, too, General Yozarro's gunboat."

The lip of the American curled with contempt.

"Let them meet and it will be Manila Bay

over again on a small scale. I only wish Captain Winton knew of this! He would sink the miserable craft or chase her to the foot of the Andes."

In the momentary reaction, Señorita Estacardo smiled:

"You have full faith in your countrymen."

"So have *you;* so has every one who knows them, and who does not? So will General Yozarro and his barbarians, if they ever rouse the anger of my people. But why do we speculate? It seems we can do nothing but wait. Manuela, can we not steal away when night comes?"

"I have asked myself that question, but I cannot see any hope of doing it. Neither of us can leave without being observed; guards will be on all sides and we shall be turned back as we were this morning. Let us go to the upper part of the Castle and look over the country. It may avail nothing, but it will be a relief to this monotony."

They climbed to the rooms above, which, as we know, were copies of those they had just left, with the narrow windows on all sides. The Señorita walked to the opening on the south which commanded a view of the densely

wooded mountains that stretched clear across the island to the main branch of the Rio Rubio. She expected to see nothing in that direction of interest and made the survey because her companion passed to the windows on the north.

"Come to me!" called the American; "here is something strange."

The Señorita was at her side on the instant. Looking across the mile of rugged country to where the northern stream wound its way, they saw a small sailboat speeding to the eastward, the moderate breeze causing it to careen far to one side. Its prow cut the curling water and the foam spread out like a fan in its wake.

"If we had a glass we might study it closely," said Miss Starland regretfully, as she scrutinized the craft.

"I don't think there is anything of the kind in the Castle, but it can make little difference. The boat is a strange one to us, and whoever is guiding it is no concern of ours."

"Probably you are right, but it looks to me as if there are two or three aboard,—ah! there are three and they are heading toward shore. They must land near where we left the boat last night."

"And what of that?"

"It looks as if they are coming to the Castle; they will soon be here!"

"That does not seem likely to me; the only ones whom we expect are General Yozarro and his friends, and so long as he has the larger craft, he will not use such a puny boat as that."

## CHAPTER XIX.

THE American did not reply, but held her gaze upon the little vessel, whose curving to the right might change at any moment; but it kept straight on under the propulsion of the breeze until hidden from sight by the tops of the trees. The three men had certainly approached land, though it could not be said they had left the boat.

"What do you make of it?" asked Miss Starland.

"Probably three natives have run to shore for a little while and will soon pass out again and continue on their way."

"Let us keep watch."

They did so, and when an hour had passed and the sun was low in the sky, the craft had failed to appear. Far to the westward, a thin, dark, shadowy line lay motionless against the horizon, too far off to be identified.

"I think it is the smoke of the gunboat,"

said the Señorita; "General Yozarro means to come to the Castle over the same course we followed."

They looked long and anxiously, but the horizontal streak of vapor gradually faded without bringing the craft into view. The tug had steamed in the opposite direction, or there had been a change of mind and the fires were banked or allowed to go out.

Miss Starland was still gazing, hoping and dreading the appearance of the craft, when her friend pressed her arm and asked in a hurried undertone:

"Do you see him?"

She indicated a point in the trail no more than a furlong distant, where it emerged around a mass of rocks, between the Castle and the waterfall. The path just there was so narrow as to permit the passage of only a single person or animal. Withdrawing her gaze from the distance, she made out the form of a man, standing at the curve. He was motionless, and evidently studying the Castle.

His dress and swarthy countenance, plainly visible in the sunlight, showed that he was a native, who, for some reason, felt a peculiar interest in the grim structure. He may have

stood thus for some minutes before the Señorita observed him, but he remained for a brief while longer, so stationary that he might well have been taken for a figure of stone.

"Do you know him?" asked the American.

"Only that he is an Atlamalcan; he wears the blue jacket; that of the Zalapatans is red, —the two tints being the distinguishing features of their uniforms; you observe he is dressed the same as our guards."

"Have you ever seen him before?"

"He is too far off for me to observe his countenance clearly, but, so far as I can say, he is a stranger. I think he is a member of our guard."

"Why then is he not with them? What is his object in going out there and posing in that way?"

"I wish I could answer your questions. Perhaps our captain suspects we are dreaming of escape and he has sent out guards to watch the Castle from all sides."

"It seems more likely to me that he came from the small boat; he may be a messenger from General Yozarro."

"If so, his action is inexplicable. If a mes-

senger, he would hurry to the Castle and deliver his message."

"Perhaps he has done so and is going away."

While all was conjecture, the man moved. It was then noted that he carried no gun though he doubtless had smaller weapons. He turned slowly about, facing the other way, strode a dozen steps or so and then passed from sight. Thinking he might appear again the two watched the spot for the following half hour, during which he was not seen again. Then, looking in the direction of Atlamalco they were unable to detect any trace of the finger of smoke which had faded out and which they thought might come to view again.

"General Yozarro may have sailed further up the river," suggested the Señorita.

"What could he hope to accomplish by that, except to run away from General Bambos?"

"He may turn into the main stream, where it bifurcates, and come down to the junction, when he can steam up to Zalapata."

"Let us stop speculating about him. Just now I am more interested in the stranger, and, as sure as I live, there he is again!"

The brief twilight was already closing in,

when the form of a man—presumably the one whom they had already noted—came into view at the point where he was first observed. Instead of pausing as before, he continued to advance toward the plateau on which stood the Castle. His pace was an ordinary one, showing neither haste nor hesitation. It was a striking proof of the shortness of the tropical twilight that although the flickering figure steadily drew nearer, it as steadily grew more indistinct. When his head and shoulders rose over the edge of the plateau, it was almost impossible to see his countenance, though no doubt remained that he was an Atlamalcan soldier. A little closer approach and he was hidden from the sight of the watchers in the upper story.

The interior was now so dark that they descended to where the lamp supported by the bracket at the side of the wall, was lighted. At the same moment, the knock of the servant Juanita sounded, and she brought their evening meal. The Señorita questioned her and she said that a soldier had just arrived and was talking to Captain Navarro of the guard, but she knew nothing of his errand.

The two friends were in a flutter, and,

tarrying only long enough to partake slightly, they hastened to their lookout. They waited and looked for a considerable time, but saw nothing of the stranger in whom they were so much interested.

When it had become wholly dark, they passed to the living apartment, which was moderately illuminated by the lamp. The gloom outside would continue until the moon appeared, when the light would be as vivid almost as mid-day.

Suddenly some one knocked on the door. The peculiar sound showed that it was not a servant claiming admission. Señorita Estacardo sprang up, turned the key and drew open the massive structure for a few inches. Then she recoiled at sight of the soldier in the blue jacket standing before her, bowing low with hat in hand.

After his "*buenas noches,*" he uttered the amazing words:

"I have come for the American Señorita."

"Who are you?"

He stepped softly inside, pushed the door shut and placed his finger to his lips as a warning for them to be cautious. The young women were frightened by his presumption,

and the Señorita was about to command him to leave, when, bowing low, he handed a slip of paper to her.

"It is for the other Señorita," he explained.

The wondering young woman took the paper and handed it to her friend, who had come forward. Moving a little aside, so as to stand under the lamp, she saw her name pencilled on the outside in a familiar hand-writing, and unfolding the slip, she read:

"You can trust the bearer fully; he is our friend; do exactly as he tells you, and do it quickly, for there is not a moment to lose.

"Jack Starland."

## CHAPTER XX.

IT WILL be recalled that the catboat, in which Major Jack Starland was descending the river in company with Captain Guzman and the Atlamalcan deserter, Martella, landed them at the spot where the young women had left the tug the night before, the cause for which action on their part has been made clear. This took place early in the afternoon, and, under the guidance of Martella, the three started inland over the trail that had been followed by the two ponies less than four and twenty hours before.

While all doubt of the presence of his sister at the Castle had been removed, the young American officer did a big lot of thinking when tracing the path through the mountains. He felt certain that when General Yozarro sent the two thither under escort, he had arranged to prevent their leaving until it should suit his pleasure. It followed, therefore, that

despite the outrage, it was necessary for Starland to act with great prudence. He had only two companions and he placed little reliance on the Atlamalcan. To attempt to bluff matters with such an insignificant force would be the height of folly. One man-of-war from the United States would find it child's play to blow these miserable little republics off the face of the earth, and when his government should be appealed to, it would be certain to bring down a heavy hand upon the offenders; but days and weeks must pass before that could be brought about, and there was no saying what deviltry would be wrought in the meantime. If ever there was call for hurry and the display of the wisdom of the serpent it was now.

When therefore the three drew near the plateau on which the Castle stood, the Major said:

"You and I, Captain, will wait here while Martella goes forward and learns how the land lies."

"If the señoritas are restrained of their liberty by only five or six Atlamalcans, why should we hesitate?"

"We shall not, if such proves to be the fact;

but if there are more, it is not well to attack until that is the only means left. It will be little trouble for Martella to learn the truth."

"Do you mean that he shall make himself known?"

"If necessary; what objection is there to that?"

"He is a deserter from the service of General Yozarro, who will show him no mercy if he once lays hand on him."

"It cannot be generally known as yet; I understand he merely came away with you, as if for a visit; he will be safe for several days. Such is my view; am I right, Martella?"

"Perhaps so, but I am not afraid of the risk."

"I do not wish you to run into unnecessary danger, but you need no instruction from me; make all haste."

The native strode from them at an even pace until he was shut from sight by the bend in the trail. We know what he then did. He did not think it wise to reveal himself at the time and made his reconnoissance therefore from a distance. It did not take him long to learn that the Castle was guarded by a dozen

men at least and probably by more. This was reported to his friends on his return.

"That puts a different face on matters," was the comment of the American; "it would be madness to attack such a force when we have only one rifle among us."

Until now Major Starland had held slight opinion of the courage and ability of the deserter, but the latter straightway made a proposal whose daring fairly took away his breath.

"Señor the Major may have been right when he said my desertion would not be known for several days, but he mistook when he thought I had made no mention of it. I told Valentin Herrera, the engineer of the gunboat, before I left; I asked him to tell General Yozarro with word from me that if I ever gained a chance I should kill him just as surely as he killed my brother. The engineer promised to bear the message to General Yozarro and I doubt not that it will be repeated to him before the sun sets."

"Martella, you're a fool!"

"Perhaps," replied the native with a grin and shrug; "but Señor the Major does not reflect that General Yozarro would have me

shot for leaving the boat without his permission. He can do no more with me than that, —why should I rob myself of the pleasure of sending him an insulting message?"

"In other words, you might as well be in for a sheep as a lamb. Very well; have you any plan to offer?"

"I will go to Captain Navarro of the guard and tell him I come as a messenger from General Yozarro, who is waiting with the gunboat to take the señoritas to Atlamalco, and he must not delay in obeying the command."

The American looked at him in amazement.

"Have you the nerve for that, Martella?"

"I await only your permission."

"I cannot permit you to run such risk; better that I should go myself and make the demand upon Captain Navarro."

"The captain has been warned not to permit any such thing, on his life. You know that though General Yozarro may be aware I have left his service, it is not likely to be known to Captain Navarro."

"It is a fearful risk, Martella. You are a good deal braver than I thought; I accept your offer; but you have no acquaintance with

the ladies; they will not come away with you."

"You can write me a few lines to hand to the American señorita that will explain it all to her."

Major Starland had a feeling that it was hardly right to allow this simple hearted fellow to sacrifice himself in this manner. He turned to Captain Guzman, who was silently smoking a cigarette.

"What do you think of it?"

"It is the only plan that will succeed and there is no certainty that it will not fail. But let it be tried."

"Will the captain of the guard obey a verbal order which it is proposed to say is sent by General Yozarro?"

Martella lifted his shoulders.

"If he refuses we shall be no worse off than before."

"We shall not, but you're likely to be. However, here goes!"

He whipped out his note book and hastily penned the few lines that have already been revealed.

"God go with you, Martella! You are a

valiant man; I can hardly believe you will succeed, but the need is desperate."

The deserter quietly shoved the little fold of paper in his pocket, close to his terrible knife, and without another word passed up the trail, his friends following him as far as was thought prudent. It was not well for them to be seen by any of the guard, since it must draw suspicion to the plan.

## CHAPTER XXI.

SO it was that the daring native came up the plateau, saluted the first sentinel whom he saw, and brusquely announced that he had immediate business with Captain Navarro. The latter was in one of the large lower apartments engaged with his evening meal. When word was brought to him, he sprang up and hastened outside, where Martella was standing erect, like a true soldier of the Atlamalcan army, and saluted him.

"Do you come from General Yozarro?" was the inquiry."

"Directly from him," was the unblushing response.

"What are his commands?"

"That I bring the American Señorita to him without delay."

"Where is the General? I am expecting him any hour."

"You know I am one of the firemen on the

gunboat; it lies against the shore where we stopped last night when the señoritas were brought here."

This was the critical moment. If Captain Navarro had learned of the desertion of Martella, the life of the latter was not worth a moment's purchase, but in reality he knew nothing of it. The Captain, well aware of the ferocious temper of the Dictator, stood in as abject awe of him as did every other citizen of Atlamalco. But as the two conversed, the wits of the officer gradually returned to him.

"Where is the escort of the Señorita?"

"Standing before you."

"You do not come alone?"

"I do—"

"But how is it the General himself does not come?"

"Perhaps the Captain would like to put that question to General Yozarro."

"I shall be pleased to read your order."

"The only order I bear has just been given to you."

"Impossible! General Yozarro would never do a thing like that."

"Perhaps you would like to say that also to the General. But I will save you the

trouble; I will tell him myself that you refuse to do as commanded."

Martella turned to move off, but the Captain caught his arm.

"No, no, no, Martella! You must not do that; you see the dilemma I am in; if I make a mistake, it will cost me my life."

"It is with you whether you shall make a mistake or not; I have done my duty."

He made again as if to go, but the officer would not permit it. The moment had come for Martella to play his trump card. The two were standing within hearing of several soldiers who, in accordance with the loose discipline of the army, made no attempt to hide that they were listening. Lowering his voice, the messenger said:

"Step aside one moment, Captain; I have something for your private ear."

When they were beyond hearing of the group, the soldier spoke in a guarded voice:

"Are you blind, Captain? Do you not see which way the wind blows? General Yozarro does not wish his relative, Señorita Estacardo to come to him, because she would be troublesome; you know of some of the General's conquests among the other sex; he is in love with

the beautiful señorita from the North, but she has friends and he must protect every step. If he sent you a written order, it might return to vex him, when the relatives of the Señorita call upon him to explain, but what does he care for poor devils like us upon whom he will be able to lay the blame of a misunderstanding? He will be able to swear that it was all a blunder of others. I respectfully suggested that a written order would be asked for by you, for you are an excellent officer who insists that everything shall be done in the order of true discipline. You know the temper of the General; he swore at me and declared that if you dared hesitate, he would have you shot. Then he cooled down and told me to explain if you asked questions. I have done so, when in the case of another officer whom he esteemed less, the favor would have been refused."

"You relieve me inexpressibly by your words, though I must look upon it as strange that you come alone. I am curious to know what you will say to *la Americana*, if she refuses to go with you, as she is almost sure to do."

"Do you think the General has forgotten

anything? Is he not too much of a veteran in the affairs of the heart? I am to tell the Señorita that her brother is waiting on the gunboat to receive her; she started last night for Zalapata to meet him, and she is impatient over the delay. You must be sure she will hasten to obey the request."

Captain Navarro was not wholly free from misgiving.

"I can understand that the General may have reasons of his own for not coming himself for the Señorita, but I do not understand why her brother does not hasten to her."

"Heard you not that he was ill with fever and needs his sister to nurse him?"

For the first time in the interview the Captain laughed.

"I beg you, Martella, not to hint to the General how stupid I was."

"Be assured I shall not. You know how many things we see which we must not see, and of late I have had many chances to view such things on the gunboat. I shall say to the General that you were as prompt and obedient as you always are to do his bidding, and that he has no better officer in his army than you."

"And you shall not be forgotten, Martella;

I will order the horse saddled for the Señorita."

Each minute added to the tension of the situation. Martella did not doubt that General Yozarro was on the way to the Castle, and more than likely was quite near. He was likely to arrive at any moment. He glanced stealthily around, determined, if he saw him or any of his escort, to make a break for it, with the chances a hundred to one against saving his neck.

Every nerve was tugging for haste, yet the first sign of impatience would ruin everything. He wished inexpressibly that the young woman should appear and that they could start at once without waiting for the pony. But that, from the nature of the circumstances, could not be. With superb coolness and courage, he said:

"While the horse is preparing, I will go and ask her to make ready; I hope," he added with a light laugh, "that she will not ask too many questions. Where shall I find her?"

"The room of the Señoritas is in the second story facing the north; a light is burning within."

Without any injunction to the Captain to

make haste, Martella saluted, and walked deliberately into the building, where no questions were asked, since he had been seen in converse with the officer and no one doubted that he came direct from General Yozarro.

Suppose, what was quite likely, that suspicion should again enter the brain of the Captain, when he gained time to think over the extraordinary situation? Suppose, what was also likely, that General Yozarro should arrive while the bogus messenger was inside the Castle? He would be caught like a rat in a trap.

And yet knowing all these things, Martella gave not the first evidence of hurry. He went up the stone steps with dignified tread, knocked at the right door, and was admitted to the apartment, where, as we know, he explained to the two young women the remarkable errand on which he had come.

## CHAPTER XXII.

THERE was not a doubt in the mind of Miss Starland when she read the few pencilled lines handed to her by the deserter. She was too familiar with the handwriting to be mistaken. She passed the paper to her companion.

"You must not hesitate," said the latter, the moment she caught its meaning; "go at once."

"Will you come with me?"

"No; I am not asked to do so. I can be of no help, and *I* have nothing to fear from my uncle, General Yozarro."

Little preparation was needed. Attired in the light, gauzy material of the tropics, it only remained for her to adjust her hat and to catch up the reticule containing a few indispensable articles. Still she lingered, impressed by the importance of the step she was about to take.

Martella stood like a statue, but the tension had become almost intolerable.

"Shall I retire till the Señorita is ready?" he respectfully asked.

"There is no necessity; I have simply to go with you."

"May I then be permitted to say that not a moment must be thrown away? General Yozarro is expected, and if we linger it will be too late."

Just then the alert ears of the man heard an unusual stir below.

"I fear he has come; we must not stay."

He lowered his voice to a whisper and could not repress signs of agitation. In the trying instant he decided upon his course of action. He would go down stairs, and in the excitement, try to slip outside. Then he would make a dash for life, with the chances still a hundred to one against success.

The friends embraced affectionately, and the Señorita gently pushed the other through the door which she opened.

"God and the saints be with you! Linger not another second."

Martella stepped outside, replaced his hat and with his deliberate walk, led the way

down the stairs, which were dimly lighted by the lamp below. Sternly repressing all signs of haste, he slipped his right hand under his jacket and rested it on the handle of his knife.

"They shall have a fight for it!" he muttered; "if the General is within reach, my knife shall find his heart."

But the flurry that had startled him was not caused by the arrival of General Yozarro. It was due to the natural curiosity over the departure of one of the young women, which had become known, when the saddled pony was brought to the front of the Castle where Captain Navarro was waiting, with one of his soldiers holding the bridle. Whatever the officer may have thought, it was evident there was no change in his intentions.

Miss Starland walked lightly forward, fastening her reticule to her girdle, so as to leave her hands free, bowed to the Captain, who snapped off his hat, replaced it, and, slightly stooping, took the tiny foot for a moment in his hand, and assisted her to the saddle and reached the reins to her. She said "*Adios!*" to him and the others gathered round, whereat there was a general uncovering. Martella saluted and with his former dignified tread,

walked toward the edge of the plateau, in the direction of the trail leading to the river from which he had come. The most wrenching effort of his life was to restrain himself from breaking into a lope and calling upon his charge to do the same with her horse. He succeeded by a supreme effort.

It was a hundred yards to the point where the bit of level land dipped, and half the distance was passed, when Captain Navarro called:

"Stop, Martella! Wait!"

The man instantly halted, thrusting his hand under his jacket and closing his iron fingers about the handle of his weapon. Matters had gone too far for any drawing back. It was now to keep on or fight to the death, for he had no doubt that the officer had changed his mind and meant to hold both until the arrival of General Yozarro.

"I will pause to hear what he speaks," he said in a low voice to the wondering young woman; "your horse knows the trail; keep on; you have not far to go to meet your brother and his friend."

She had checked the pony, but twitched the rein and he walked steadily toward the dark-

ness, leaving the grim Atlamalcan to have it out with Captain Navarro. The latter was approaching fast and came up panting slightly from the exertion.

"Martella, you will not forget to remind General Yozarro that I was quick to obey his command, as soon as you gave it to me?"

"Have no fear, Captain."

In the immeasurable relief and the dread of awaking distrust, the deserter punished himself. Instead of immediately following his charge, he remained facing the officer. It seemed wise to indulge in some pointless converse.

The Captain looked inquiringly at him, not understanding the cause of his hesitation.

"Is there anything more you would say to me, Captain? Though I have lingered longer than I expected, I can afford a few more minutes."

"No, no, except to repeat that you shall be remembered by me. I am sorry that I detained you; it is best you should make haste."

"Then, if you are sure, I will follow the Señorita, but I can wait a brief while longer, Captain."

It was the latter who now showed nervous-

ness, though the strain upon him was not a tenth of what the other suffered.

"Off with you! Do you not see that you may lose the Señorita?"

The pony with its rider was passing from view below the margin of the plateau, and the man now made the haste that looked natural. Although the trail was easily followed, his place was in advance. While gliding past the stirrup, he said:

"We have been fortunate, Señorita, but much danger still threatens."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

SOMETHING prompted Martella to turn his head and look back. Not Captain Navarro alone, but two of the soldiers had come to the head of the path and stood out in clear relief in the strong moonlight, looking after the vanishing couple. Martella grimly thought:

"The Captain is not easy in his mind, but it is now too late for him to stop me."

A little way down the trail, under the shadow of the deep foliage, stood the two men who were awaiting the coming of the messenger and young woman. The time, brief as it was, had been trying to the last degree to Major Jack Starland, who came forward into the moonlight and approached the halted pony, which pricked his ears and showed some timidity. But the rider readily controlled him.

"Halloa, Jack!"

"My dear Warrenia!"

He reached up and pressed the small gloved hand and the grasp was warmly returned.

"General Yozarro seems to have forgotten to be a gentleman," she said.

"He never was one; if I ever meet the scoundrel I shall slap his face, if his whole army is looking on."

"Then I hope you will never meet."

The party was stationary, though still near enough to the Castle to justify uneasiness.

"Where are we going, Jack?"

"To the river; we have a boat there, in which we shall sail to Zalapata, there to stay till the yacht returns, and then good bye to this infernal country forever."

"And none will be gladder than I; but what of General Yozarro? Martella told me he is expected every minute at the Castle."

"No one knows better than our good friend, but what of it?"

"Which route will he be likely to take,—by land or the river?"

The question did not seem to have occurred to Major Starland, who turned to Martella for an answer."

"I think he will come by the gunboat and land where we did."

"Then there is a good chance of meeting him and his party?"

"Nothing is more likely; we must not forget to prepare for them, for they may be close at hand."

"What do you suggest?"

"I will walk far enough in advance to give warning. When I see or hear aught of them, I will whistle like this."

He illustrated and added:

"When that falls upon your ears, you will make haste to turn off into the wood."

"But there are many places where we cannot turn off, without taking a plunge down a precipice."

"Then run back till you find one."

Martella now strode down the path, which was so deeply shadowed that he quickly slipped from view.

"With your permission, Major, I will follow next, keeping a short way in advance of the Señorita and the horse. You may take the front or rear, as you think best."

"I will keep at the bridle. I cannot see that danger threatens from the Castle, and surely we are well guarded in front."

There was no call for delay and the proces-

sion moved in the order named, the guide being so well to the fore that only at intervals was a glimpse caught of the shadowy form, where the moonlight flooded the winding trail, which gradually descended until it reached the Rio Rubio to the northward. The three composing the main party did not speak, for all their senses were centred in those of sight and hearing. It had been in the mind of Miss Starland to propose that her pony should be dismissed. The task of walking was nothing to her, and the animal was really an incumbrance, but she saw as yet no objection against utilizing him: the necessity of parting with him might come at any time.

Past the murmuring waterfall, along the rocky face of the towering precipice, with fleeting glimpses of the myriad monkeys eternally flitting through the tropical forest, with the discords of nocturnal animals, and the squawking and cries of disturbed birds of a hundred different species, amid the soft moonlight and deep shadows, our friends threaded their way, listening and peering into the gloom, their hopes high, and yet with misgiving in every heart.

Half the distance was traversed, when the

pony stepped around a projecting bend of the trail, which sloped abruptly along the face of the mountain wall. Major Starland paused and with a gentle pressure of the bridle rein checked the animal.

"Some distance must be passed before the path broadens," he said; "I hope we shall not hear Martella's signal when half-way thither."

Captain Guzman had also paused as if with the same thought. He was twenty paces in advance, but did not speak.

"Shall we wait for a few minutes?" asked Miss Starland.

"It will avail nothing; the passage must be made."

"But Martella will be farther away and that will help."

"He may go so far that we shall not hear his signal."

Nevertheless, they remained motionless for a few minutes until Captain Guzman was seen to move forward again. The delay was fortunate, for a hundred yards down the trail, the three were suddenly thrilled by the vibrant whistle, whose echo came back from the oppo-

site cliffs. Captain Guzman whirled and came running back.

"Hurry! Not a moment is to be lost!"

The trail was narrow, but an expert animal could turn.

"Don't take the risk!" commanded the Major excitedly; "give me your hand and dismount."

"I can do it; let me alone."

Without hesitation, she jerked the head of the pony around, so as to face the appalling slope, and, speaking firmly to him, continued pulling strongly on the bit.

"It is madness! You will both be carried over."

But she gave no heed. The intelligent animal pressed his haunches against the rocky wall, and began carefully turning. His four hoofs were set close together, the front ones on the very edge of the abyss, over which his head projected, and down which the dirt began crumbling. The support of one hoof yielded and he sank partly sideways. The Major uttered an angry exclamation and tried to snatch his sister from the saddle. She resisted and not for a second did she lose her superb nerve. The horse saved both by partly

rearing, and with his fore legs in air swung round as if on a pivot and set his feet down again on firm earth, with his nose pointed toward the Castle. She twitched the rein and spoke sharply. He broke into a gallop up the path, with the indignant officer, running at his heels, and Guzman close behind him.

" 'Twas the maddest folly I ever saw, but heavens! what nerve!"

Brief as was the distance, when they reached the summit of the trail, Martella dashed up after them."

"I saw him!" he said excitedly; "he came on the gunboat and has several officers with him; they will pass within a few minutes."

Miss Starland now took the hand of her brother and dropped lightly to the ground.

"It was quite interesting, Jack: I hope you weren't scared."

"My heart was in my mouth; I gave you up; if you had gone over, it would have been your own fault."

"But I didn't go over."

Martella seized the bridle, pulling so hard that the pony's head was drawn horizontal. A rod or two and they reached the broadening path and turned abruptly off among the trees

and undergrowth. Where the vegetation was so profuse and dense, a little way was sufficient to hide them from any one passing over the path.

As always, Martella assumed the lead, the horse still reluctantly following with the others around and behind him. Suddenly the beast refused to go farther.

"What's the trouble?" asked the Major.

"Something has frightened him," suggested Captain Guzman.

The guide was savagely stamping. Then he stopped and tugged again at the rein. The horse dragged back but allowed himself to be drawn a little farther. All came to a pause, grouping themselves together, where one was hardly visible to the others.

"What was it?" asked the Major, in a whisper, of Martella.

"He smelled a serpent in front of us, and I stamped him to death."

"Was it venomous?" the American was prompted to ask.

"I think it was a coral snake, but he was not large."

"If he had bitten you?"

"Pardon me, Major, he did not."

"There may be others near us."

"Perhaps; their bite is sure death; we must be ready to crush them under our feet—hist! here come General Yozarro and the officers."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

THERE were six of them, all coming out as clearly in the powerful moonlight as if the sun were in the heavens. The stout form of General Yozarro was at the front, walking at a moderate pace up the slope.

The moment he entered the field of vision, Major Starland heard Martella gasp, as if catching his breath. Then the American felt a hand upon his rifle, as if the other were trying to draw it from his grasp.

"My chance can never be better," whispered the deserter.

"I will not allow murder to be done; a brave man would not ask it."

The native loosened his straining grip upon the weapon, and all silently peered from the gloom at the procession filing past. None of the spectators spoke, but each caught the sounds of fitful conversation among the Atlamalcans. No one could have been more gen-

erous than the Dictator in the way of imprecations, which was no cause for surprise to Miss Starland.

Until the purchase of the tugboat, General Yozarro had usually passed between his capital and the Castle of Rest on horseback. Now, however, he preferred the water route, although it compelled him to walk a difficult mile.

At the moment when the rear of the procession was opposite our friends, who were breathlessly watching from their hiding place, the pony suddenly threw up his head and emitted a resounding whinny that could have been heard a mile away.

"That means a fight!" exclaimed the Major, tightening his grasp on his rifle; "be ready, Captain and Martella!"

The moment the alarming cry echoed among the mountains, General Yozarro and his friends stopped and stared in the direction of the disturbance. Martella was the only one with the quickness of resource to meet the crisis. In a twinkling, he slipped the bridle of the horse over his head, unfastened the cinch and flung the saddle to the ground. Then, pointing the nose of the animal toward

the trail, he gave his haunch a pinch like the nipping of a fire ant. The animal responded with a snort and leap, and then trotted to the group who stared at him in astonishment.

The Major and the Captain caught the shrewdness of the action. By driving out the horse without any belongings, he gave the impression that he was an estray, probably cropping the herbage, when disturbed by the approach of strangers. He had not been ridden long enough to show the marks of bridle or saddle, unless examined closely, which was not likely to be the case.

"They may learn the truth," whispered Martella; "be ready!"

The animal slowed his pace and walked snuffing suspiciously to the waiting company. When one of the officers reached out to grasp his forelock, he flirted his head away. The brute preferred his freedom to serving a master.

Some natural surprise was expressed that he should be wandering alone, so far from the Castle, and the listening friends heard General Yozarro suggest that it might be worth while to look farther. They were about to do so when he changed his mind.

"Captain Navarro is not careful with his horses: I must remind him to have a better care of my property."

With this observation, the General resumed the lead and almost immediately the party disappeared, vastly to the relief of our friends. Martella waited only until they were beyond sight, when he led the way back to the trail.

There was no further call for him to act as advance scout, though he again placed himself at the head of the little company. He could readily have captured the horse and offered to do so, but Miss Starland refused the favor, saying it was a grateful relief to walk, after having been so long in doors. Accordingly the pony was left to himself.

The situation had changed. The danger was transferred to the rear, though it was not likely to threaten for some time to come. General Yozarro would not dream of the truth until he reached the Castle. There he would quickly learn that the cunning of the deserter had drawn the American Señorita from his custody and probably taken her beyond reach. It would require less than an hour for him to go to *Castillo Descanso*, and

only a short time to hasten back over the trail to the river.

Would he do so?

This was the question Major Starland asked himself, while tramping directly behind his sister. Such a thing would be so daring an outrage that it seemed improbable. What excuse could he offer when coming into the presence of the two American visitors for so high-handed an interference with their rights? Hitherto he had shown a fulsome obsequiousness to both, and acted the part of a high-toned gentleman. How could he throw off that courtesy which seemed a part of his nature, and still forbid their going and coming as they pleased?

Doubtless the Major would have convinced himself that what he mentally outlined was not to be feared from the Dictator, except for a most important fact that obtruded itself: the presence of Martella, the deserter, with the company of fugitives, as they must now regard themselves. That would justify him in pursuing the ingrate to the uttermost confines of his dominion, and to make his shelter by General Bambos a *casus belli,* especially if the message left with the engineer of the tugboat

had been delivered. Acting under this pretext, Yozarro would be able to bring the man's companions within his power, with the opportunity of carrying out the plans he had formed respecting them. His infatuation had destroyed his tact, judgment and sense, of which his furnishment had never been great.

Strange that one of the most likely contingencies of the peculiar situation did not present itself to any one until it flashed upon Major Starland, while threading the mountain trail and when near its termination. General Yozarro's tugboat must have come ashore directly behind the catboat of his predecessors. He would recognize the smaller craft, and know that the American had gone to the Castle to join his sister, no doubt with the intention of bringing her away. He must have destroyed the usefulness of the catboat and thus estopped the flight of the fugitives by that means.

While such action on his part would appear to have been certain, yet it did not accord with his conduct when on the way to *Castillo Descanso*. The sight of the pony would have told him the truth, and he would have been certain to make an investigation on the spot.

But that was not done, nor was there anything in the words or manner of the Atlamalcans to show that he held a suspicion of the real situation.

"Martella must have thought of all this, yet he did not show it by word or act."

Walking briskly, they soon passed up a slight incline, descended another and arrived within a short distance of the Rio Rubio. Then, for the first time, the officer recalled that the trail bifurcated like the river itself. One fork turned to the right, which led to where the sailboat had been secured. Without pausing, Martella turned down this, and a few minutes later all stood on the river's margin.

## CHAPTER XXV.

THERE nestled their boat with no sign of having been visited during their absence. Its prow was drawn well up the bank, and the sail lay in a roll on the boom and at the foot of the single mast with everything snug. Martella hastily examined every portion of the hull, stepping into the water to do so, and finally said with a grin:

"None of them saw it."

"That is better fortune than I expected. Providence has been kind to us, but where is *their* boat, Martella?"

They listened for the blowing off of steam, but, save for the never silent sounds from the forest and jungle, all was silent.

"It is not far away; General Yozarro made the landing above and passed up the other trail to where it joins this one. It was lucky, for, had he come here, as he did last night, he must have seen our boat. He would have

crippled it, and when he met the horse along the trail, he would have known we were near. There is no need of undue haste, and if you do not care, I will visit the gunboat."

"Are you not running great risk?"

"The only ones there are the engineer and two firemen; I have nothing to fear from them."

"You have my permission."

The vegetation and foliage were so intricate that, instead of taking the shorter distance, the native loped back over the trail to the forking, and then went down the other to the river's edge. As he expected, he found the tug lying against the shore. In a country where wood is superabundant and coal almost unknown, the former was used exclusively on the craft. A large quantity was always piled at the front, some of the kinds belonging to the most valuable exports, with such a close grain that it gave out as fervid heat as the mineral itself. Instead of maintaining a high pressure of steam, the engineer allowed it to sink. The return of General Yozarro was not looked for under several hours, and with so much resinous wood at hand, the furnace could be quickly fired up. It was a saving all round to let

the steam moderate, which explains why our friends heard nothing of the craft sleeping less than thirty rods away.

Despite the confidence of Martella, he knew his venture was not wholly free from risk, and in the face of his comradeship with the crew, it was not unlikely that they would seek to win the good will of the Dictator by delivering the deserter to him. If there were others beside the engineer and firemen on board, it would be imprudent to the last degree to entrust himself to them. He therefore spent considerable time in reconnoitering.

Moving stealthily here and there, and peering out from the shadows, he soon made out the form of a man seated on the gunwale at the front, doubtless in quest of coolness. He was smoking a cigarette and something in his appearance was so familiar that the deserter called, in a guarded voice:

"Valentin, is that you?"

The man looked sharply around and removed the cigarette from between his lips.

"Martella!" he replied in the same careful voice.

"Who else is on the boat?"

"Only Juarez and Dominguez."

He had mentioned the names of the two firemen.

"Is it safe for me to join you in a smoke?"

"For a little while only."

Martella came out in the moonlight, moved softly up the plank which connected the boat with the shore, and seating himself beside his old acquaintance, lit a cigarette. They talked for some minutes, as if no cloud had come between them, and then the visitor, heeding the warning of the engineer, bade him good bye and hurried back to his friends, who were becoming impatient over his absence.

Major Starland and the others noted that the deserter was in high spirits, but no one could understand why this should be the case.

"It is as I thought," said Martella; "the gunboat landed General Yozarro and the officers who have gone to the Castle."

"We knew that before."

"And he did not dream of the presence of our boat so near. Things would have been different had he known it."

"I may add, Martella, that that information is not new to us."

"But some things are new. The only ones

on the boat are the engineer and two firemen. There will be no trouble about it."

"Trouble about what?"

"Capturing the boat; the crew will make no resistance, for it is not intended that they shall do any fighting. If they do, we can defeat them easily."

"So you have a plan for capturing that old tug of General Yozarro? What do you think of it, Captain?"

"It can be done with little trouble as Martella says. I was thinking of the same thing while he was away. It would be a fine trick to play on General Yozarro."

"And I should be glad to help, but it will not do."

"Why not?"

"Despite what General Yozarro said, the two republics are not at war. If they were, the capture would make your fortune. As it is, it would bring your ruin. General Bambos would be obliged not only to disavow the act, but to punish you for the offence."

"I was thinking," said Martella, "that perhaps the Major would be willing to take the responsibility."

"I admit that the temptation is strong, and,

were not Miss Starland's interests at stake, nothing would please me more than to capture that wheezy tug and scuttle it, but it may bring unpleasant consequences to her and therefore is not to be thought of."

Captain Guzman said these words were wise, and Martella was compelled reluctantly to accept the situation, though it irked him. The sail of the boat was hoisted, Miss Starland was given a seat at the stern, and the men united to shove the craft into deeper water.

"There is little wind," observed the Captain, "but it is favoring and we ought to be at Zalapata soon after daylight."

The two natives placed themselves at the bow, and the Major as usual, took charge of the tiller, thus bringing himself close to his sister. The wooded shore so blanketed the catboat, that Martella took up a pole to push the craft out into the stream. Soon, enough impulse caught the sail to give headway, and they moved slowly out toward the middle of the river. Martella laid down the pole, and seated himself, still grinning.

"Major, I have pleasing news for you," he chuckled.

"I am listening."

"The engineer gave my message to General Yozarro."

"He did! It is fortunate for you that you and he did not meet."

"More fortunate for *him* than for *me*," was the significant comment.

## CHAPTER XXVI

THE sailboat crept slowly out into the middle of the river, the breeze being so light that only a faint rippling was heard at the bow, and the craft hardly answered her helm. Major Starland had noted that the wind was not favorable, and he was compelled to tack toward the northern shore. He ran close in and was cheered by a freshening of the breeze which added perceptibly to the speed.

"At this rate," said his sister, "we shall not reach Zalapata till tomorrow is well advanced."

"It cannot matter, for there is no special need of haste."

"Suppose, when General Yozarro returns, he pursues us?"

"It is not impossible; it will be easy for him to overhaul such a slow-sailing boat as this, but he dare not offer us harm. Are we not free born Americans, and will not our government be quick to punish such an offence?"

"You must not forget that the South American is an idiot, for, had he not been, he would not have dared to forbid my leaving the Castle."

"Since a long sail is before us, why not let me adjust a couch for you to sleep?"

"Sleep! As if I could sleep at such a time as this! I had all I needed last evening when in prison."

It will be remembered that Captain Guzman and Martella were seated at the bow, facing those at the stern. Thus the moonlit river beyond was in clear view, and the sombre, motionless form of the tugboat could be made out where it snuggled against the southern bank. The deserter was speaking in low tones to the Captain, when he uttered an exclamation which caused the officer to turn his gaze to the rear.

That which the former fireman saw was a number of sparks mingling with the heavy vapor that was beginning to tumble out of the smokestack. The next moment both saw that the craft was heading out into the river.

"General Yozarro and his officers have returned!" called Martella; "the firemen are

cramming the furnace with wood; they mean to pursue us!"

Jack Starland and his sister looked behind them. The Atlamalcan had spoken the truth. The time seemed much too short for the party to have made the journey to the Castle and back. In fact, it was impossible for them to have done so, but there could be no doubt that they were all on the tugboat. The explanation instantly flashed upon Martella.

"Captain Navarro suspected the truth some time after we left and hurried to take us to the Castle again. Some news may have reached him, or his own sense told him of my trick. He met the General on the way."

Such undoubtedly was the fact. Had our friends suspected aught of that nature, they would not have frittered away the precious minutes as they had done.

Meanwhile, the resinous wood flung into the furnace of the tugboat was doing its work. From the single smokestack poured the murky vapor, sprinkled with crimson sparks which were tossed right and left high in air, to drop hissing into the water. In the moonlight, a snowy winrow at the bow showed that the tug was plowing ahead with fast increasing speed.

Capable of making a dozen miles an hour, she was already doing her best, and coming up with the sailboat hand over hand.

Only a few minutes were given the fugitives in which to decide what to do. A straight away race was hopeless, for the pursuer, now no more than an eighth of a mile distant, was sure to overhaul them in a very brief time.

"I am inclined to let General Yozarro come up with us," said the Major; "I have no fear of his molesting me or Miss Starland, and I am rather curious to hear what he has to say for himself. We are in our own boat, or at least not in his, and we have committed no crime against the Atlamalcan Republic, whatever that name means."

"You must not think for an instant of such a thing," said his sister with great earnestness.

"Why not? Do you hold him in fear?"

"No; but he will take vengeance upon Martella, who has served us so faithfully."

"Great heavens! I never thought of that; and he will be as merciless with Captain Guzman for having helped Martella."

"And with *you* for crossing his path."

"With me! I long for a meeting with him;

but, Captain," added the American, raising his voice; "it will not do for you and Martella to be on board when General Yozarro overtakes us."

"I think you are right," replied the Captain; "the General and I have never loved each other, and even General Bambos would not object strongly if it is proposed to shoot me for aiding an Atlamalcan to desert from his navy."

Martella said nothing, but no one understood the situation better than he.

"I will head the boat for the southern shore, where you two can look out for yourselves."

"I am afraid you will not have the time to reach it."

"It *must* be done!"

The American had pushed the tiller sharply round, and the boat was speeding diagonally for the bank. The change of course gave her a fairer wind, but the tug was coming up so fast that it looked as if she must head off the fugitives. Full steam had been put on, and our affrighted friends, when they looked back, saw the tumbling foam at the bow, the spreading wake streaming fanlike to the rear, and the dark figures crowding forward, amid

whom it was easy to believe they discerned the form of General Yozarro cursing the engineer for not attaining better speed.

"If we cannot make it," said Martella to the Captain, "we must jump over and swim."

"We cannot swim any faster than we are going now, and the water abounds with enemies."

"None is so treacherous as Yozarro; I at least will try it; I can let myself over softly and make so long a dive that perhaps he will not notice me."

"Wait a few minutes, Martella, for I do not like your plan."

The brief interval decided the question. It seemed that the sailboat might touch land before the pursuer could interpose to head them off. Martella decided to take his chances with the others.

The tug was now so near that Yozarro called:

"Stop or we'll blow you out of the water!"

"Blow and be hanged!" called back Major Jack; "if you fire on an American citizen, your nuisance of a republic will be wiped off the earth."

"You have a deserter with you; I demand his surrender."

Therein shone the cunning of General Yozarro. If an American was fired upon in Atlamalcan waters for carrying off a deserter, it was little satisfaction our citizen would be able to obtain. Without hesitation, Major Starland shouted:

"We have the man; come and get him!"

## CHAPTER XXVII.

ENERAL YOZARRO'S red-hot temper burst into uncontrollable flame, and he committed a blunder which allowed the game to flit when it was within his grasp. To the consternation of every one, he gave an instant order to fire upon the sailboat. The officers protested, but the Dictator was irrestrainable. He hurried down from the upper deck and ordered two sailors to train the gun at the front on the little craft. The better to accomplish this, he shouted to the Captain to slacken speed, so as not to distract the aim of the gunners.

For a minute or two Major Starland could not believe what he heard, but the movements on board the tug left no doubt of the frightful purpose of the raging creature on the larger boat. Holding the tiller steady and keeping the head of the small craft straight toward shore, the Major said to his sister:

"If they hit us, it will be by accident; you would better stoop your head."

She instantly obeyed and he leaned forward himself, so as to offer as small a target as possible. Captain Guzman and Martella sat motionless, watching the tug rushing down upon them and ready to leap ashore the instant they came within reach.

All a-tremble with the intensity of his rage, General Yozarro stood to the rear and beside the six-pounder whose muzzle was pointed toward the little boat. He measured with his eye when the right instant came, and snapped the lanyard. A spout of smoke and flame shot from the muzzle and the boom rolled across the river and was echoed from the further shore, as the solid missile sped on its errand.

Barely more than a hundred yards separated the two craft, when the explosion came. General Yozarro had aimed to sink the other boat, reckless of the lives he sacrificed. It may have been and it probably was because he took the best aim he could, that the ball missed the catboat by twenty feet and crashed harmlessly into the jungle beyond.

The delay caused by the slackening speed of the tug gave our friends the chance they were prompt to use. Not the slightest change had

been made in the course of the craft, whose prow the next moment impinged sharply against the shore, and Captain Guzman and Martella sprang out. Instead of running away, however, they seized the gunwale and tugged to draw the bow up the bank.

Grasping the hand of his sister, Major Starland dashed after them. They had the length of the boat to travel, but quickly did it and joined their friends on land.

"Why do you dally?" he called angrily; "if you wait another minute, you will be taken! Off with you!"

"Fret not about us," was the gruff response of Martella; "attend to the Señorita, and we'll look after ourselves."

The great fear in the minds of all was that General Yozarro would fire the rear gun. It would take a few minutes to bring it to bear, and, although neither he nor his men knew how to aim to hit, an accident might result in harm. The passing seconds were of measureless value.

But, before the tug could veer, a gleam of returning reason came to the ruffian. He had done an outrageous thing, but providentially without evil consequences. It would not do

for him to repeat the crime. He might claim, as doubtless he meant to claim, that the first shot was fired as a warning to bring the smaller craft to, though in all his life he never tried harder to destroy and kill.

He shouted to the Captain to head for land, and the officer did so with a skill born of experience. In rounding to, he narrowly missed smashing the smaller boat.

Now, through one of those coincidences which occur oftener in this life than is supposed, the catboat had touched shore at the opening of a clearly-marked trail, leading into the interior. It was pure chance or providence, for even Martella knew nothing of the path, which was one of many that wound down to the river. It was his intention to plunge into the jungle with no other thought than that of immediately finding a hiding place for his friends and himself, when he happened upon the path. Yielding to impulse, he called out the fact and told the others to follow, as he hurried up the slight incline.

But a few paces told him this would never do, for their pursuers would be right behind them. He abruptly stopped.

"We must turn off," he said, "and let them pass us."

"They may not do so," suggested Starland.

"They will not know where to look for us."

He began picking a course among the matted vegetation, unmindful of the dangers that might threaten. Miss Starland went next, then her brother, and then Captain Guzman. They penetrated no more than twenty feet, when, at a whispered word from Martella, all halted, and, as they had done earlier in the evening, watched for their pursuers to pass. In this instance, however, the path was so screened that nothing could be seen, and our friends depended wholly upon their sense of hearing.

Less than ten minutes elapsed between the landing of the two parties. General Yozarro was the first to set foot on shore, and, noting the trail, he started up it on a lope, with the others hurrying after him. Their footsteps were heard by the crouching fugitives, who were unable to see a single shadowy form.

"How long will they keep that up?" asked Major Starland when the last had gone by.

"Not long," answered Captain Guzman;

"they know the Señorita cannot travel fast, and that, if we took the trail, they must quickly come up with us."

"Failing to overtake us, what will they do next?"

But for the darkness, the Captain would have been seen to shrug his shoulders. It was the deserter who spoke:

"They can do nothing but wait."

"Martella, I am now ready to join you in capturing the tugboat."

"*Esta buena! Esta buena!*" whispered the delighted fellow; "it makes no difference, if there is more risk, for we do not know how many they have left behind."

"Hang the risk! Lead on!"

In his eagerness, Martella took no pains to hide the noise of tearing through the jungle, and the next moment they emerged into the trail again. The Major had already instructed his sister to stay at the rear, with the Captain directly in front of her. There was likely to be sharp fighting, and she must keep out of it.

"When we rush aboard, remain on the bank till I call to you."

She promised to do as told, and the three

men, their heads bent forward, went down the trail at the double quick, she readily keeping pace with them. The brief distance was quickly passed, and the three drew together on the edge of the river, just within the shadow.

"The Captain is in the pilot house," whispered Martella, indicating the figure of a man who had seated himself; "but I don't think there are any others beside the engineer and firemen."

"Leave the Captain to me," said the American, who sprang into the moonlight and led the way up the gang plank with the two at his heels. In his left hand was his rifle and in his right his revolver.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN his haste General Yozarro had given no orders to secure the tugboat in place, nor was there need of doing so. The water was deep enough to permit the craft to lie against the bank, where it was held by the gentle turning of the screw. With a few more vigorous revolutions, the prow would have gouged into the bank, or taken the boat into the river on the proper direction of the wheel.

Running across the gangplank, with a firearm in each hand, Major Starland bounded up the few steps leading to the upper deck. The Captain of the boat was seated in the pilot house, calmly smoking a cigarette while he waited. His gaze being turned dreamily toward the river, he saw nothing of the intruder, or, if he heard his footsteps, he was not disturbed. His awakening came, when the athletic American strode forward and thrust a revolver through the window of the pilot house.

"Do as I tell you and you won't be hurt; try to do different and I'll blow your brains out!"

These words, uttered in Spanish, were to the point. Without them, the action of the officer would have made his meaning clear. The Captain was cooler and braver than any of his countrymen. He did not stir, but looking into the face of the other, removed his cigarette and said:

"I shall be pleased, Señor, to be told in what way I can serve you."

"You shall learn in a moment; at present continue smoking, and hold yourself ready for orders."

He bowed and with a smile that showed his even white teeth, replied:

"I am happy to do as you say."

"Are you armed?"

"I am the Captain of this boat; General Yozarro does not allow me to attend to any other duty; I have no weapon on me; would you prefer to search me?"

"I accept your word."

The Major turned to look for Guzman and Martella. The sound of voices showed that they were on the boat.

"Warrenia," he called, "come aboard!"

She was alert and moved quickly up the plank.

"Now, Captain, steam out into the river."

"Pardon me, do you not wish the gangplank drawn in?"

"We have no time; do not wait."

The Captain was on his feet, one hand resting on a spoke of the wheel, while the other gripped the curved piece of brass, which being drawn upward twice sent an order to the engineer to back the boat. Major Starland stood listening with some misgiving, for he did not know how things had gone below. The response, however, indicated that all was well, for almost on the instant, the screw began churning, and the boat slowly receded, allowing the gangplank, after being drawn askew, to drop with a splash into the water.

Knowing the purpose of their leader, Guzman and Martella had hurried into the engine room, where Valentin Herrera, the engineer, was found dozing. The place was smotheringly hot, and below, the firemen were asleep, so used to it that they would have slumbered in tophet itself.

There was consternation for a moment, but

it did not take the visitors long to impress upon the men that the boat had been captured and that their lives depended upon their prompt acceptance of the changed conditions.

"How many are with you?" asked the engineer, who knew his former fireman so well that he did not feel much personal fear of him.

"Enough to hold you all at our mercy."

"You know Captain Ortega is in the wheelhouse."

"Major Starland has attended to him."

"I have heard no pistol shot."

"The Captain is a wise man and has surrendered; Valentin, I want to make General Yozarro angrier than before," added Martella with a grin.

"He cannot be any angrier than he has been ever since I gave him your message; but I accept the situation. He cannot condemn his men for being overpowered when he leaves them no weapons with which to fight. You needn't fret about the firemen or me—"

Just then the gong clinked in response to the switching in the pilot house above.

"That means go back."

"I wouldn't wait, Valentin; our leader, *el*

*Americano,* is impatient, and is quick to use the revolver he carries."

"It is my duty to obey orders," commented the engineer, with another grin, as he made the necessary shifting of cranks and levers to set the machinery to plunging and swinging. The drowsy firemen cared little for what was going on over their heads and slouchily threw wood into the furnace.

"It is my wish to go to Zalapata," Major Starland explained to the Captain of the tug; "General Yozarro set out to take my sister there last night, but seems to have changed his mind, for he brought her only part way. We will now complete the journey."

"At the highest speed, Señor?"

The American did not catch the significance of this question, but accidentally he made the best answer.

"There is no haste necessary; we shall be able to reach there soon after sunrise; you know how fast to go; am I understood?"

"Perfectly, Señor."

Feeling himself master of the craft, Starland now went back into the Captain's cabin to see his sister, whom he found seated in the quarters which had been occupied by her and

the Señorita Estacardo the evening before. Although this species of craft are not intended to carry passengers, outside the necessary equipment, General Yozarro had caused the small compartment to be fitted up and furnished suitably for the entertainment of guests. The swinging lamp was lighted overhead, and the bottles, glasses and fragments of cigarettes showed how the Dictator and his friends had spent most of the time in coming from Atlamalco.

Miss Starland was flustered and nervous, but the cool self possession of her brother greatly reassured her.

"That was a clever trick we played upon the scamp," said he with a smile.

"What do you intend to do with the boat?"

"Take you to Zalapata; it would serve him right if I scuttled it, but I will turn it over to Bambos to keep or destroy as he pleases—"

She was about to speak, when shouts and calls caused both to hurry outside. As might have been anticipated, General Yozarro and his party had speedily returned and had halted on the edge of the river, the President shouting his orders for Captain Ortega to return at once. The Major, standing beside the

pilot house, could not deny himself the pleasure of answering for the other.

"The Captain is under my orders; he cannot obey you."

"That is my boat!" howled General Yozarro; "return at once or suffer the consequences of your thievery."

"I'll suffer the consequences, but I am only borrowing it for a little while; you did not seem to be able to deliver Miss Starland to Zalapata, and I will do it myself; I place at your disposal the small boat we left behind."

"I shall make known your crime to your government," shouted the Dictator, for nothing better to say.

"I shall be glad; perhaps it would be better to lay it before The Hague Tribunal. The whole world will be interested in learning what a cowardly wretch calls himself President of the Atlamalcan Republic."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

IT is quite probable that General Yozarro felt himself unequal to the situation, for he said nothing more. He could plainly be seen standing out in front of his friends, who, he noted, were busy at something. They were hoisting the sail of the catboat and the whole party scrambled aboard, as it was shoved from shore. Their weight sank the craft low, but it buoyed them safely, and the smaller craft began its pursuit of the larger one, somewhat after the manner of a handcar chasing a locomotive.

As before, there was no comparison in their speed, despite the fact that the tug had slowed down considerably. Major Starland ordered the Captain to hold their relative position. His contempt for the ruffian Dictator was so deep that he could not forbear exulting over him.

The men in the fire room knew that they

had no choice except to obey the orders sent down to them. No responsibility could attach to them, and the American would visit fearful punishment upon any disobedience or treachery.

Guzman and Martella came to the upper deck, where Major Starland was holding converse with Captain Ortega.

"I wish," said the Major, speaking too low for the Captain to hear him, "you would find out how many are in the boat yonder. I make it six."

The three gave several minutes to scrutiny and agreed there were seven, which was more than had been supposed.

"And all are heavily armed, some with pistols and some with swords; if they should come alongside, they could give us a pretty fight."

Captain Guzman took it upon himself to say:

"General Yozarro and Captain Sepulveda —if he is there—are the biggest cowards in the Atlamalcan army, but the others are fighters. I know three of them who are worse than tiger cats. They are eager for a chance to attack us."

"And they should have it, but for two reasons: it will be too great a trial for my sister. We could beat them off, except for the danger in our rear."

The two looked inquiringly at the American.

"That Captain at the wheel is one of the bravest of men. He is devoted to General Yozarro, or at least holds him in fear; the moment he gained a chance to strike a blow for him he would strike hard, no matter at what risk to himself."

"He carries no arms; he has no chance."

"He may know where he can lay hand on a weapon; if he attacked us behind, while we were repelling boarders—as I am sure he would—the jig would be up. So I have ordered him to keep the present distance between us and their boat. After awhile, we shall pull away from them."

There was no driving off the uneasiness regarding Captain Ortega. Starland sauntered over to the pilot house, and, with assumed carelessness, kept furtive watch of the man. He could see nothing suspicious in his deportment. He had flung away his cigarette, and both hands were upon the spokes of the wheel,

which now and then were shifted slightly as cause arose. He peered keenly ahead, for the bifurcated river has its treacherous places, like our own Mississippi, and he who guides so large a craft in its current has need to keep his wits about him. The moonlight gave a fine view of the broad stream, and the Captain seemed to feel no interest in anything else.

"I don't know whether he is up to mischief or not," reflected the American; "if he is, he is mighty sly. Let him try to play me false and I won't hesitate a minute to shoot him."

The Major looked toward the other boat, which instead of trailing directly at the rear, was following a parallel course, about half way between the tug and the southern shore, and some two hundred yards to the rear. Filled with so many men, the craft looked like a variegated bouquet floating down the muddy Rio Rubio.

It was the fact that General Yozarro maintained a pursuit which, in the nature of things, was hopeless, that caused Major Starland misgiving. It must be that the Dictator was counting upon some move in his favor by the Captain of the tug, which held the former to his course, and the latter was biding his time.

Studying hard, the American could think of no scheme which promised the slightest success in this direction, but none the less, he was convinced that something was on foot, and that it could be frustrated only by alertness on his own part.

In this uncomfortable frame of mind, he came down from the upper deck and followed his two friends forward, where they were leaning against the pile of wood near the gun. Both were smoking and occasionally glancing up at the pilot house, as if they too were apprehensive of the man, whose head and shoulders were in sight. He had resumed smoking and the tip of his cigarette glowed in the moonlight.

The three stood for a few minutes without speaking, when Martella straightened up and asked in a low voice:

"Have you noticed, Major, that our speed has increased within the last few minutes?"

The American looked off over the water and then at the shore, but could see nothing to enlighten him.

"The other boat is falling behind," said Captain Guzman.

Glancing at the smaller craft, all doubt was

instantly removed. The tug was steadily drawing away from it.

"Captain," he called, looking up at the pilot house; "we are going too fast; slacken your speed."

"As you please, Señor; I beg your pardon."

The signal was sent down to the engineer, who quickly brought about a diminution in the progress of the tug.

"Probably it was unintentional—"

At that moment, all felt a jar through the craft, accompanied by such a rapid slackening of pace that the three took an involuntary step forward.

"We've run aground!" exclaimed Starland.

"There's no doubt of it," calmly added Martella.

## CHAPTER XXX.

"IT WAS done purposely!" added the American, placing his hand on his revolver. Glancing up from where he stood, the head and shoulders of Captain Ortega were in fair sight through the lowered slide at the front of the pilot house. He made no attempt to elude the bullet that he must have expected.

But prudence told the American to wait. The services of the other were too valuable for the time to be thrown away, even though the man was under suspicion. Besides, there was one chance in a hundred that the mishap was unintentional.

Hardly had the motion of the boat ceased, when the double clinking of the gong in the engine room sounded, accompanied by the jangling of the bell, which called upon the engineer to reverse instantly at full speed. The water at the stern was threshed into muddy foam, but the craft did not slide off the incline up which it had partly glided.

"Give her full head!" called Major Starland.

"We are doing so, Señor!" replied the placid Captain.

"Your life depends on getting the boat off."

The other made no reply, but with the hand on the pulse of his patient, as may be said, he noted all the symptoms. He was seen to turn and look in the direction of the catboat, as if he expected something from that. He was not disappointed.

General Yozarro and his friends were quick to note the mishap that had befallen the tug and they headed their craft toward it. They meant to board, and, despite the bravery of the defenders they were quite certain to succeed, since, as has been shown, the "house was divided against itself."

The American dashed to the stern, calling upon Guzman to follow. It took them but a moment to turn the muzzle of the gun so that it bore directly upon the catboat.

"If you come any nearer, I'll blow you out of water!"

Then the Major added a bit of information which perhaps was superfluous:

"We Americans always hit what we aim at."

General Yozarro saw that it would never do. He was heard to speak sharply to the man at the tiller, and the small boat immediately veered off. Daring as some of the inmates might be, they had not the courage to advance straight against the throat of a gaping six-pounder.

"Martella, take charge of the other gun!" called the Major to the deserter, who, as quick as himself to note the danger, had stepped to the side of the second piece of ordnance. The two half-circles commanded by these included the whole horizon, a fact which General Yozarro and his comrades were not likely to forget.

It would seem that it was impossible for Captain Ortega, with the aid of the engineer, to effect any change in the position of the tugboat, while it stuck to the submerged bank, like a bull ramming its head against a stone wall. Instead of staying motionless the stern swung slowly to the right and then to the left, as if trying to wriggle its nose out of the mud. This caused the muzzle of the cannon to wabble, sometimes being directed straight at the

sailboat, and sometimes to one side of it. But the gun was so easily shifted that the American could readily perfect the aim whenever he chose, and that would be done the instant the enemy tried to run in upon him.

There was a fighting chance for the Atlamalcans. They were so near that by fiddling back and forth they might by a sudden dash close in. Most likely, had the wind been strong they would have tried this, but the breeze remained so soft that quick action was impossible. The situation was so critical that Major Starland warned the others of what was certain to follow an attempt to board.

"General Yozarro, I hold a repeating rifle in my hand; you are in clear view; just before firing the cannon, I shall shoot you, and when I pull trigger, you'll drop!"

The Dictator was on his feet about to summon the others to surrender, with threats of the consequences that would follow a refusal. The words of the American threw him into a panic and in his haste to scramble back, he tumbled over the man directly behind him, not ceasing his frantic efforts till he was cowering at the stern.

The laugh of the American was heard, before he called out:

"I'll pick you out, no matter where you are in the boat, but I sha'n't fire till you try to run in on us. We'll rake you fore and aft, and if you don't believe what I say, all you have to do is to test me."

The General could be heard consulting with his officers. Evidently the counsels were divided and some favored making the rush, despite its danger, for, as has been shown, not all of them were poltroons, but that awful threat of the American had done what it was intended to do. Had General Yozarro followed his own promptings, he would have withdrawn, but he lacked the courage to do that, and in his dilemma tried diplomacy.

"Major Starland, I have naught against you, though you have stolen my property, but I have the right to demand that you surrender the deserter with you. Do that, and we will trouble you no more."

"You are not troubling me in the least; I'm enjoying this, though it doesn't seem to give you much amusement. However, you may as well save your words regarding the noble Martella, who has served us so well. He

has cast his fate with us and I consider him worth a thousand such as you."

There was really no call for the General to keep up the conversation and he subsided. The action of the current steadily bore his boat forward, but the helmsman shied off toward the northern bank, and bye and bye, was farther down stream than the tug. Either one or the other of the six-pounders carefully followed the relative change of position, and an eighth of a mile below the smaller craft glided out of sight around a sweeping bend in the river.

All this time the screw of the tugboat was viciously churning, but the prow held fast. Once or twice a trembling of the hull seemed to show a partial lessening of the hold, but nothing more.

The danger of boarding having passed for the time, Major Starland returned to the cabin to speak to his sister. She had understood everything that had taken place and needed no cheering. Then he rejoined Captain Guzman and Martella at the front.

"We are free of the General for awhile."

"But there is no saying for how long," remarked the Captain.

"What do you think he means to do?"

"I cannot guess, unless it is to keep on to Zalapata and to appeal to General Bambos."

"Which is likely to be bad for you, Captain, unless Bambos is anxious after all to go to war, as he pretended the other day."

"I think," said Martella, "he means to get more men and attack the boat."

"But where will he get the men from? He is a long way from Atlamalco."

"Yet not very far from *Castillo Descanso*, where he has quite a force as you know."

"That will take many hours and we shall not stay here forever."

"There is no saying how long it will be."

"I must have a few words with the Captain."

Major Starland immediately left the lower deck and climbed to the pilot house, where the executive of the tugboat, having nothing pressing on his hands, had sat down on the stool placed there for his convenience and was smoking another cigarette. Looking around, as he heard the footsteps, he touched his forefinger to his hat and said:

"*Buenas noches*, Señor! We are still fast."

"That cannot be disputed."

## CHAPTER XXXI.

THE American leaned on the bottom of the slide, with his face scarcely two feet from the other, and with the revolver at his hip within instant reach.

"Captain Ortega, will you answer a question truly?"

"That depends upon the question, Señor; if I answer at all, it shall be truly, but I may choose to leave it unanswered."

"Did you run this boat aground on purpose?"

Captain Ortega took two or three complacent whiffs, gazed off over the moonlit river and then removing the wisp of tobacco from between his lips, smiled, and looking into the face before him, coolly replied:

"I did, Señor."

"It was after my warning to you."

"Begging pardon, Señor, it could not well have been before."

"What did you hope to accomplish?"

"To help General Yozarro to recover his boat."

"How?"

"I expected him to dash forward and board."

"He lacked the courage to attempt it."

"I am sorry to agree with you."

"But he was wise; I kept one of the guns continually bearing upon him and would have blown him and his men to kingdom come."

Again the Captain puffed his cigarette. He looked dreamily down the river where the sailing craft had passed from sight.

"You would not have harmed General Yozarro or anyone in the boat."

"You are insulting, Captain; I could not have missed them."

"The port gun had no charge in it!"

"Good heavens! is that the truth?" demanded the astounded American.

"You have only to examine the piece for yourself to learn that it is."

"Did General Yozarro know it?"

The Captain puffed several times so hard that the point of fire touched his mustache,

then he impatiently flung the bit out of the window. Superbly self-possessed as he was, he could not conceal his anger.

"How could he help knowing it, when by his own orders the charge was withdrawn before we left Atlamalco? What his whim was I didn't ask and do not care."

"Knowing that, why did he hesitate?"

"Because," replied Captain Ortega with a sneer, "he feared you might have learned the truth, and reloaded the gun. I had no way of telling him different."

"Why did you not tell *me*?"

Looking straight in the eyes of the American, the Captain said:

"I am an Atlamalcan!"

"And the best of the lot! But, Captain, did you not fear I would carry out my threat of shooting you when you ran the boat aground?"

"I expected you to *try* to do so, but I, too, should have done some shooting also."

"You told me you were unarmed."

"And when I said I had no weapon on me, it was the truth, but I did not tell you that I did not know where to lay hand on a revolver whenever it should become necessary."

"I respect your frankness; I can suspect your plan, but may I not hear it from your own lips?"

"I was on guard, and had you raised your weapon when standing below, I should have fired my own first, and pardon me, Señor, I should not have missed. Your two friends were also in fair range and would have received my attention in the same moment."

"I must consider it fortunate that I did not act on my impulse, for at no time did I fear anything of that nature from you. Having refrained, what then was your plan?"

"I had not a doubt that General Yozarro would board, having every reason to believe the port gun was empty, without any such thought on your part. The moment he tried to do so, I should have left the wheel and done what I could to help him; I think I should have been able to give him some assistance, Señor—I beg your pardon, I think I heard you called Major."

"Little doubt you would; it was that I feared more than anything else, though I doubted your having a pistol. My fear of you was my chief reason for trying to frighten them off from boarding."

Captain Ortega seemed to think the subject entertaining, for he lit another cigarette—first offering the box to the American—crossed his legs, leaned back at his leisure, looked smilingly up in the American's face, and said in an even voice:

"It may be treason, Major, but General Yozarro is a coward! He spoiled everything by refusing to attack, when nearly every man in his boat was eager for it. When I was on the point of calling to him that the gun was empty, he tumbled back in the boat at your threat. I was so filled with contempt that I vowed I would give him no help; I shall do nothing more to aid him, for, after I opened the door, he was too scared to enter it. To prove I am in earnest, Major, I now surrender my only weapon."

With which he drew out a beautiful silver-mounted revolver from under his loose jacket and extended it, with the muzzle turned toward himself, to the wondering American.

"I decline to take it, provided you will give me your parole to remain neutral in whatever may occur while I am on this craft."

"You have my pledge," said the Captain, shoving the weapon back.

"Can you tell me what General Yozarro is likely to do?"

"I can, but to do so, would be a violation of my neutrality."

"A fair hit!" laughed the American; "I spoke without thought, but it will not touch the question of neutrality if you tell me how much longer we are likely to remain fast in the mud."

"You may be aware that we feel the ocean tide to some extent in this part of the Rio Rubio. Some time beyond midnight, if we do not drive farther upon the shoal, the tide will lift us clear. You may not have noticed, Major, that the screw has been driving us forward most of the time, instead of backward. It is doing so now, but with your permission, I will order the engineer to reverse."

"Well, I'll be hanged! I heard you do that a good while ago."

"That signal was for *your* benefit; there was another sent down the tube for the private ear of the engineer which you did not hear."

## CHAPTER XXXII.

MAJOR STARLAND thrust his hand through the window of the pilot house.

"Give me the pleasure, Captain."

The other smilingly returned the pressure. Each saluted and the American passed back into the cabin, where his sister awaited him. He explained the situation.

"Do you know who he is, Jack?"

"I believe his name is Captain Ramon Ortega."

"Have you never heard it before?"

"It seems to have a familiar sound, but I cannot identify it."

"He is the betrothed of Manuela."

"Why didn't I remember it? I can't help admiring the fellow, for he is the soul of honor."

"She could have told you that."

"You and he are acquaintances, but he does not seem to recognize you."

"He cannot fail to know me, for we have met, but I think he prefers to be a stranger, while our relations are so peculiar. He will not allow me to leave without a few words."

"Great heavens! I came near shooting him, but I guess it wasn't any nearer than he came to shooting me. He is as brave as he is high minded."

The young woman had removed the remnants of the feast left by General Yozarro and his guests so that the small, richly furnished apartment looked tidy and attractive. She reclined on the silken covered lounge placed against the side of the cabin, and her brother bade her good night and returned to his comrades, seated at the front and talking in low tones. To them the Major told of his talk with Captain Ortega.

"You do not doubt what he told you, Major?" said Guzman inquiringly.

"It is impossible."

"General Yozarro has not a braver or more honorable officer in his army. Three years ago, when we were at war with Atlamalco, and neither republic owned a fleet, we had a fight with three hundred Atlamalcans in the mountains. Each force was about the

same and it was one of the hottest fights I ever saw, for the respective forces were commanded by Generals Bambos and Yozarro."

"Did each take a personal part in it?"

"Yes," replied Captain Guzman with a grin and shrug of the shoulders, "that is to say, so far as directing matters was concerned. I saw Bambos peeping out from behind a big rock, swinging his sword, shouting and yawping till he seemed ready to burst, but taking good care when the bullets were whistling near that he was out of reach. I didn't see anything of Yozarro, but—"

"I did," interrupted Martella; "he was in a deep hollow and made sure his head never rose a half inch above the edge. He did his part too in bellowing orders, but I don't suppose he commanded any more attention than Bambos, Captain."

"Both forces fought independently of their leaders."

"You commanded yours, Captain, and did it well."

"Not so well as Captain Ortega, for it was that thundergust flank movement which drove us headlong out of the mountains, with some of the men never halting till they reached

Zalapata. Captain Ortega and no one else won that battle."

"General Yozarro knows his worth," said Martella; "he would have made him a general long ago if it was not that he is jealous of him. He is the only one I know who doesn't fear General Yozarro. They often quarrel, for the Captain is plain of speech to every one. Yozarro has announced that he means to make him admiral of the fleet which he intends to build up. That I suppose is why he has placed him in charge of the gunboat, so that he shall have all the training and experience he can."

"How does he feel toward you, Martella?"

The native gave his usual shrug and grinned.

"I know enough to keep away from him. He will never forgive me for deserting. He knows my grievance and may pity me, but he would be glad to shoot me, if he had a fair excuse for doing so. I don't mean to tempt him, even if he has given you his pledge of neutrality and is the most honorable of men. If General Yozarro finds fault with him, it will be just like Captain Ortega to say right before all the other officers 'I gave you a chance, but

you had not the courage to use it and I would not waste any more effort on you.' "

None of the three could make a satisfactory forecast of the policy of General Yozarro. It seemed to the American that he might be able to secure two or three pieces of cannon and open a bombardment of the boat from the shore, but this presupposed an unreasonable delay. Captain Guzman said:

"He has no way of getting cannon this side of Atlamalco, and that would take a day or two; he has no wish to destroy his own property, and, if he had such a wish, he couldn't do it, for only by accident would he hit the boat."

"That squelches my theory, which I didn't believe in myself. I'll have another talk with the Captain, though his sense of honor isn't likely to allow him to say much."

It was beyond midnight and the two were conversing in a friendly way, but without anything important being said, when they looked in each other's face with a pleased expression. A welcome fact had become known to both at the same moment.

"The boat is moving," whispered the American.

With the screw motionless, she had been lifted clear by the tide and now swung clear. The Captain drew out his watch and held it so the moonlight lit up the face.

"There is no reaching Zalapata until toward noon, provided we get there with this gunboat, Major."

The significant intonation and smile which accompanied these words puzzled the American, who would have given much to have had them explained. But it was useless to question the Captain and the only comfort was in the thought that he was an honorable foe.

"Now for Zalapata!" he added.

"I assume, Captain, that you are familiar with all the windings and dangers of the river."

"Didn't I prove it by running aground? But there will be no more mishaps of that nature while I hold the wheel."

"Your pledge is sufficient," remarked the American, who again passed to the lower deck and joined his friends. He told them of the curious remark of Captain Ortega, but none of the three could guess his meaning.

"The only thing that *is* certain," said Captain Guzman, "is that General Yozarro and

the rest are somewhere down the river and we shall hear more from them."

No one felt any disposition to sleep and none really needed rest. The engineer and firemen caught cat naps whenever they could. Captain Ortega was probably in the same state with his three male passengers. His duties did not require long runs as a rule, but the present demand having arisen, he was equal to twenty hours or more at a stretch.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE tropical night wore away and the growing light in the east showed that day was dawning. With the exception of the men who wrought below, Miss Starland was the only one who slept during those monotonous hours, but she was astir early, and with the help of Martella set about preparing the morning meal for the crew and passengers. General Yozarro could be counted upon to carry a well stocked larder, and little solid food is required in so warm a country. Many of the fish in the bifurcated river are of delicious flavor, but rice and fruit form the principal diet. She prepared coffee and the first food that was ready was taken below by Martella for the men who did the hardest work.

"The Captain must not be forgotten, Martella; will you carry a tray to him?"

"Not for all the gold in the Rubio Mountains; you told me you allowed him to keep his pistol."

"True, as you said, it isn't best to tempt him too far; I will take his food to him."

"Permit me to do so," interposed Captain Guzman, who thereupon performed the pleasing task. Ortega was first invited to come to the cabin to join them, but he replied that his duties required him to remain in the pilot house. The delicate feeling that prompted his refusal was understood by the brother and sister.

Just as the meal was finished, all were startled by the hoarse, tremulous whistle overhead. Two long blasts sounded, and the clink of the little brass lever was heard as it dropped back to its resting place against the sounding tube.

"What does that mean?" asked Major Starland, who the next moment bounded to his feet and hurried to the Captain, with Guzman at his heels.

"Captain, what is the cause of that signal; have you so soon forgotten your neutrality?"

"It is a salutation to the steamer just coming round the bend. Listen!"

A sepulchral tremolo rumbled across the water, and the topmast of a craft was discerned gliding along over the stunted tops of

the timber growing on the projecting point of land which for the moment shut the hull from view. From the highest point fluttered the most beautiful flag ever bathed in the sunlight of heaven. It seemed to be bounding forward as if borne at the head of a charging regiment.

"By heavens!" exclaimed the happy American, to whom the answering signal was one of the most familiar sounds on earth; "that's the *Warrenia,* my own yacht!"

"I am pleased to know it," said Captain Ortega.

Miss Starland was scarcely behind the others in climbing to the upper deck. The Captain lifted his hat, they smiled at each other, but there was no other sign of recognition.

First the clean cut prow, with the pretty flag of the Triton Navy dallying from the staff, then the graceful hull and the peak with the flag of our country streaming in the gale created by its own motion, and the whole magnificent craft steamed round the bend and headed toward the tugboat. With dancing eyes centered upon the thrilling picture, our friends saw a snowy puff shoot upward from

the brass cylinder and the old welcome signal shuddered across the water.

"Will the Señorita oblige me by replying?" asked Captain Ortega. The radiant young woman, with a smile and inclination of her head, but with no further evidence that they were acquaintances, stepped into the door that the Captain opened for her, and grasping the cord answered the boat named for herself. Then, thanking the courteous officer, she passed out again and excitedly waved her handkerchief at a lady who was seen standing in front of the others at the bow.

"That's Aunt Cynthia! There! she has raised her glass! She knows me! Bless her dear heart!"

The woman had recognized her niece and her handkerchief was also a-flutter. An understanding was had through the signalling of the whistles and the two craft rapidly approached each other. Major Starland swung his hat in greeting, again the whistles bellowed across the decreasing space and all was gladness and joy.

While they were yet too far apart to converse readily, the Major had noted another form near the pilot house, a little to one side

of Aunt Cynthia. It was bulky and broad, was in gorgeous uniform of blue and gilt, with the golden sash high up in front and low at the back, and the point of his scabbard touching the deck.

"What the mischief is General Bambos doing there?"

"Probably he is a self-invited guest," suggested Captain Guzman.

"True, and I can afford to welcome him; it is fortunate that the yacht took aboard new supplies at San Luis."

The tinkling of signal bells and the reversing of screws and the shifting over of wheels brought the two boats so nearly alongside that conversation became facile among all parties. Holding off the *General Yozarro,* Captain Ortega waited to know the wishes of his chief passenger, who now became the supreme authority on both crafts.

Under the manipulation of the adepts at the respective wheels, the boats were laid beside each other and the gangplank of the yacht connected the two. Miss Starland was the first to run across and was clasped in the arms of her delighted relative. Then her brother, Captain Guzman and Martella fol-

lowed. General Bambos bowed as nearly to the deck as he could, with his plumed hat sweeping the air, and expressed his happiness at meeting the charming young American señorita again. Then, while the boats remained lashed, he asked an explanation of the situation, which was a mystery to him as it was to nearly all the others.

Major Starland took it upon himself to enlighten him and his friends, doing so with a succinctness that left no doubt in the mind of any one. The broad face grew solemn, when he succeeded at last in comprehending the remarkable story.

"You will permit me to say, Major, that you have committed a serious international offence."

"And I am prepared to bear all the consequences of my crime."

"They are likely to be graver than you seem to think; it is your duty, first of all, to apologize—"

"Apologize to that scoundrel of a Yozarro! I'll see him hanged first!"

"You will not deny that it is your honorable duty to restore the Atlamalcan navy to my excellent compatriot, General Yozarro."

"You seem to be concerned for the brother with whom, only a day or two ago, you were eager to go to war. I don't want that old tub which he calls a gunboat; he is welcome to it; Atlamalco holds a single solitary gentleman, Captain Ramon Ortega, who is up there at the wheel, and he is at liberty to take the boat back to his chief with my compliments, and that chief may go hang."

"But that will hardly do; you took it by force from him and should return it in person. It is the only way by which an international complication can be prevented."

Yielding to an impulse inspired by the humor of the situation, Major Starland said:

"Very well; I'll take it upon myself to deliver the *General Yozarro* to its owner with my own hands."

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

MAJOR Jack Starland carried out his thoughtlessly formed plan. I fear it must be conceded that his motive was not a wholly chivalrous one. He saw the chance for humiliating the man for whom he felt only unmitigated contempt. He had not a whit of respect for the pompous Bambos, but the ponderous nuisance had not insulted him and his unpardonably. No doubt had the opportunity come to the President of the Zalapatan Republic, he would have acted with similar dishonor, but in the affairs of this world, men are judged by their deeds instead of their motives. Only One can be unerring in his judgments.

"General Bambos and I will go aboard the tugboat and steam up the river till we find Yozarro. We may have to go to Atlamalco, but it makes no difference; the *Warrenia* will act as our escort, and I shall make sure the affair is conducted in the highest style of the

art. I don't wish to involve my government in the broil."

Accordingly, after everything had been explained to Captain Winton of the yacht, the American officer and the General walked beside each other across the gangplank, which bowed threateningly under the unusual weight, the support was drawn in, and both craft began moving at moderate speed up the bifurcated river. The *Warrenia* dropped a little way to the rear, and held thus while the two ascended the stream.

Excusing himself for a few minutes, the Major left the General in the cabin and went forward for a few words with Captain Ortega, who, cigarette in mouth, smilingly saluted and welcomed him.

"You understand, Captain, the arrangement that has been made?"

"I heard what was said; you have agreed to turn over this boat in person to General Yozarro."

The American nodded.

"You will permit me to say, Major, that you have done a foolish thing. When you left the gunboat as you did, I was free to pick up the

General and that should have been the end of the affair."

"True, but I am quite willing to feed his vanity to the extent demanded by General Bambos; but I wish to say, Captain, that I am in the dark as to where we shall find your President. He sailed down the river ahead of us, but the yacht saw nothing of him, when it seems he should have been met, and we have not observed him on our way."

"Pardon me, Major, you should say 'I,' not 'we.'"

"Do you know where General Yozarro is?"

"I have known for several hours; I believe my status has been changed by the late occurrences and I may speak freely."

"Unquestionably; no cause remains for further secrets between us."

"Then I may say that some hours ago, when you stood where you are now standing, discussing this question with me, my eyes were resting on General Yozarro."

"You astonish me, Captain; be more explicit."

"I knew when he sailed out of sight around the bend in the river, that he would not go far. He did not. He ran to the southern

bank, lowered his sail, and pulled the boat so far under the overhanging vegetation that neither you nor your friends noted it. Knowing where to look, I was more fortunate. The General signalled to me to come to land, so that he and his men could attack you."

"Why did you not do so? Yet it would have been your death warrant to have made the attempt."

"That was not the reason why I did not go to him; I had given the General one opportunity, and was too impatient with him to provide a second. But, more than that, you had my parole."

"True; I had forgotten that. May I ask what you think General Yozarro's plan is?"

"He does not understand why I refused to obey his signal, and there will be a hot quarrel over it when we meet. He expects me to return, sooner or later, for he must know that the purpose of yourself is to reach Zalapata with the Señorita, after which I shall be at liberty to return to Atlamalco. I shall, therefore, find him not far from where I saw him a few hours ago."

"I beg to renew the assurances of my distinguished consideration, Captain," said the

American, saluting and passing back to the cabin.

The massive Dictator of the Zalapatan Republic was puffing and striding to and fro over the short length of the cabin, the point of his scabbard titillating against the floor, for his steps, though of moderate length for an ordinary man, were long for a person of his build. His face was redder than ever, and it was clear that he was agitated over some great question that was wriggling through his brain.

When he wheeled and faced the American, he whipped off his plumed hat and sagged down upon the lounge at the side of the cabin. It creaked but held.

"Pardon me, General, you seem disturbed in mind," remarked the young officer, drawing up a stool and seating himself opposite.

"I *am* disturbed, Major; nothing in all the world could have happened to cause me greater regret."

"You refer to the affair of last night; I cannot see that you have any concern with that."

"Captain Guzman was involved with you."

"If you are so afraid of offending General

Yozarro, you can easily disavow the act of your officer, though he deserves all praise for what he did."

"Be assured that I shall disavow his crime in the strongest terms, and, if General Yozarro demands it, the Captain shall be severely punished."

"The other day, when you were talking with him and me, you were hot for war against Atlamalco."

"True, but since then I have received a great light."

The amazed American waited to catch a ray himself, but it came not and he said:

"I delivered your message to General Yozarro yesterday."

"And he received it graciously?"

"Most graciously; there was no hint about sending me back to you from the muzzle of one of his cannon; he begged me to assure you he would have your complaint investigated and would do his utmost to meet your demands."

"What I might have expected from my noble compatriot!" exclaimed the Dictator with greasy unctuosity; "I was sure of it."

"But you did not look for such magnanim-

ity, when in council with Captain Guzman and me. May I ask to what is due this marked change of sentiment on your part?"

General Bambos lifted himself to his feet and swung across the cabin several times, finally crashing back to his former seat on the vexed lounge.

"You have heard of General Simon Bolivar?" was his unexpected question.

"Who has not? He was the great Liberator, born in Venezuela in 1783, who freed Peru, which then became Bolivia, and was rejected by Colombia, because she did not know how to appreciate his greatness. His was the finest character ever produced by South America."

"I am glad to hear that you appreciate him," said General Bambos, his small black eyes glowing.

"The greatest compliment ever paid General Bolivar was when he was called the South American Washington. *He* is the standard by which the world's heroes are measured."

"You have many heroes in the United States; I have read of Abraham Lincoln: how does *he* compare with Washington?"

"The two stand side by side, and sometimes it is hard to see which is foremost. One was the creator and the other the preserver of his nation."

"How do *I* compare with Washington and Lincoln?"

## CHAPTER XXXV.

THE question for the moment took away the breath of the American. He looked into the crimson, flabby countenance and wondered if the man was in earnest. He was. By great effort, Major Starland held back the laugh tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"Well," said he, pulling himself together and speaking slowly, "perhaps you come, say within a thousand miles of each. I don't see how the distance can be shortened."

"That depends upon the place you give others," blandly observed the Dictator, who accepted the rating as a compliment; "where do you place General Bolivar?"

"I should have to make careful calculation; he might come within a mile or two, but remember that the modern world has not yet produced the peer of George Washington or Abraham Lincoln, nor do I see any signs that she is likely to do so. Have you been figuring on a comparison yourself?"

"I am too modest to claim to stand on the same plane with either of your great heroes, but reflection convinces me that I have been selected by heaven to be the successor of General Simon Bolivar."

"Inasmuch as to when?" said the Major gravely.

"I beg pardon; I do not understand your question, Major."

"I wait for you to explain *your* meaning: what is your ambition?"

"It is to form a grand confederation of South American states; as you know, our continent is divided into no end of petty republics. Why should they not unite into one powerful, resistless whole?"

"The only obstacle is themselves; each country is so jealous of every other that it prefers to fight rather than to fuse. Zalapata and Atlamalco are illustrations; they are continually quarreling and at war over trifles that would shame a couple of schoolboys."

"All that is ended; henceforth General Yozarro and I are brothers, and the two republics will join hands in the path of progress. Our example will be quickly followed by Venezuela, by Colombia, by Ecuador, by Bo-

livia, by Brazil and all the states down to and including Patagonia. Will not that be the grandest confederation the world ever saw?"

"Undoubtedly—when it is formed. Is the conception your own, General?"

"It is; it has been forming in my mind for weeks and months; more than once I was in despair, and not until last evening did the splendor of the scheme burst upon me in all its fulness."

"You are dreaming what others dreamed before you, but the only one who made a fair start toward its realization was Simon Bolivar, and he died disappointed and broken-hearted. I suppose the first step will be to send ambassadors, or whatever you choose to call them, to the different republics of South America, proposing a meeting of representatives to consider the great scheme?"

"That will be the first step. It will take some time for a full exchange of views, and a committee will be named from each government to draw up the plan for confederation."

"Your scheme contemplates that this union shall be a republic, like my own country?"

"No other form can flourish in the clear sunlight of liberty of South America."

"Not the least important step, after the plan has been formulated, will be the choice of the Chief Magistrate; who should he be?"

The American knew what was coming, but the enjoyment of prodding the bulky ignoramus was none the less exquisite.

"The thoughts of all would naturally turn to the man who originated the grand scheme; they would feel profound gratitude, and inquire whether he is competent to carry out the plan and make the dream a realization; an immense majority will insist that the responsibility and honor shall go to him."

"And in that case you would be the man?"

The little head wabbled forward on the short neck.

"There can be no forecasting the whims of the public; the hero of to-day is the traitor of to-morrow, and vice versa; suppose some one other than you should be fixed upon; suppose General Yozarro should be called to the head of the confederation?"

The crimson countenance became more crimson; the breaths shifted to pants, and the tiny eyes twinkled with a sinister light.

"Impossible! Such an outrage can never be."

"Let us assume that it does come about; it is best, you know, to consider all sides of an important question."

"I would never consent! I would withdraw from the union! I would shatter the whole scheme, if I were treated with such shameless ingratitude."

"You forget that each republic would bring forth its own particular crop of favorite sons, and you would stand no more chance of selection than I. You declare yourself warmly in favor of the confederation; which do you place the higher,—the beneficent scheme itself or your own ambition?"

"It is not ambition, sir, but simple justice that I demand *and will have!*"

"Do you consider yourself the only man on the South American continent qualified to be the president of such a union?"

"By no means; there are plenty beside me, but none with such paramount claims to the honor."

"Admitting this, our own Washington or Lincoln, or any one of our leaders, was ready at all times to lay down his office for the good of his country; that, and only that spirit, is true patriotism; I don't believe there are ten

native men between Nicaragua and the Straits of Magellan, who have ever experienced the feeling. Your strongest republics refuse to pay their just debts, and when England, Germany and some of the European Powers try to compel them to be honest, they bellow over the Monroe Doctrine and are ready to fight the United States because she won't come down and help them play the defaulter.

"No, General; the first step toward the success of your scheme is an impossible one; that is, the reconstruction and making over of the *genus* South American. When somewhere a so-called republic is set up, and a President elected for a term strictly defined by its Constitution, the President refuses to go out of office at the close of that term and starts a revolution. Several others with a similar ambition do the same, and there you have the normal republic in this part of the world. Atlamalco, Zalapata and most of your governments are simply world's nuisances."

"Your statements, sir, are not only false but insulting; I have more faith in my patriotic countrymen than you, for I know them better; they are brave, unselfish, long suffering——"

General Bambos had progressed thus far in his speech, when he emitted a rasping shriek, clapped his hand behind him and made so tremendous a leap that his crown bumped against the ceiling of the cabin. At the same time, the tenor of his remarks abruptly changed, and he danced and rubbed with pain. One of the pestilent "fire ants" of his country had managed to snuggle among the crevices of the lounge, and its nip was like that of a red hot pair of pincers.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE fire ant of the tropics does not merely bite into the animal or person who disturbs it, but bites out, as may be said. It abstracts a fragment of one's anatomy, so that, had General Bambos been placed on a delicate pair of scales immediately before and after his nipping, there would have been an appreciable difference in his weight. Since Major Starland himself had suffered from the fierce little pest, he understood what had befallen the other. He tried to express his sympathy, but instead, threw back his head and gave way to merriment.

The victim was suffering too much from his hurt to pay heed to the laughter which must have struck him as untimely, but no doubt he would have turned on the American, had not the hoarse whistle of the tugboat sounded, and brought him hurrying from the cabin. They were nearing the bend of the river

around which the Major had seen the catboat containing General Yozarro and his friends disappear. That Captain Ortega was right in what he said was proved by the emergence of the smaller craft from under the heavy foliage along shore. In answer to the signal of the tug, it glided out from shelter, propelled by two of the men with poles. The sail was not hoisted, for the wind had fallen to a calm. The Captain turned to meet the catboat, for he knew the depth of the water permitted him to run close to the bank, but he halted when a few rods away and waited for the other to come up.

General Yozarro could not be expected fully to understand the changed conditions, with the American yacht steaming forward a short way behind his own boat. Captain Ortega called out a brief explanation, and the men continued poling until the smaller craft lay alongside the larger one. General Bambos, holding to a stanchion with one hand, reached down with the other and helped his illustrious compatriot to climb upon his own property, the others following more nimbly, until all had transferred themselves, and the catboat was made fast by one of the crew.

The President of Zalapata, saluting and bowing low, conducted the other dignitary to the cabin, with the officers trailing after them. For the moment, Major Starland found his situation a trifle embarrassing. General Yozarro scowled savagely at him, but the others paid scant attention. There was some crowding, for it will be remembered that the apartment was of slight size. The American waited till a lull came in the conversation and then, with an elaborate military salute, said:

"General Yozarro, I have the honor of returning to you the boat which necessity compelled me to borrow last night."

The General had seated himself on the lounge, at the risk of suffering the same mishap which had befallen his neighbor and still kept him slyly rubbing the injured part. He was too overflowing with rage to make any pretence to the courtesy which marked their previous chats. His prodigious mustache bristled, his thick lips trembled and his black eyes gleamed threateningly. He glared at the American, standing among his own officers, who made what room they could for him in the restricted space, and when he could command his tumultuous feelings, he spoke:

"You come to surrender the boat! You surrender yourself also, *el Americano!*"

"Well, hardly; I stayed aboard at the suggestion of my friend, General Bambos, that this thing might be done in due and ancient form. American citizens are not in the habit of surrendering at the demand or whim of any South American nobody."

Removing his hat, the Major bowed low and smiled.

"Does he speak the truth?" bluntly asked General Yozarro, turning to Bambos. The face of the American flushed at the slur, but he held himself in hand.

"He does; he remained at my request," said General Bambos with a nod.

"There were others who took part in this crime; one of them was Captain Guzman of your staff, General."

"I need not assure you, General, that it was without my knowledge; I disavow what he did and will reprimand him; if Your Excellency demands it, I will have him shot."

"Not much!" muttered Major Starland, loud enough for all to hear; "is that the way you reward one of your bravest officers, General Bambos?"

"I rule in Zalapata without the aid of *los Americanos,*" was the freezing reply.

"And without the aid of common gratitude and decency,—*that* is evident."

"I will take the matter into consideration," said General Yozarro, whose brain was not nimble enough to decide the simplest question off-hand. "At present, I do not demand the death of Captain Guzman, but I thank you for your words, General, which is only one of the many proofs I have received of your disinterested friendship."

If the countenance of General Bambos had not already been as crimson as it could well be, he would have blushed. He saluted and muttered something about the pleasure he felt in deserving the regard of his distinguished compatriot.

General Yozarro strove to restrain his anger, but it was plain to every one that he was seething with rage. While Major Starland was wondering what could be the cause, the explosion came:

"One of my men, the basest of wretches, deserted my service yesterday and allied himself to Captain Guzman and to you. He sent me the most shockingly insulting of mes-

sages; since he is not on this boat, he must be on the other."

"Such is the fact, General," replied the Major, compressing his lips, but looking straight into the eyes of the other.

"He must be surrendered to me."

"I receive no orders from you; you murdered the brother of Martella, though he had done nothing wrong; the message he sent to you was not respectful perhaps, but it was better than you deserved; Martella has done me and mine the best of service, and he shall never be surrendered to you."

The fury of General Yozarro threatened to suffocate him. He rose to his feet and the others glanced apprehensively at the face of the man who had dared to defy the terrible Dictator, and who folded his arms and still looked him calmly in the eye.

"*El Americano*, you are here on my boat and here you will stay till that deserter takes your place. I give you the choice; if he is not turned over to me to be shot, you shall be shot in his stead."

With all his contempt for this man, Jack Starland had never dreamed of anything like this. The words of Captain Ortega came

back to him. There was a certain shadowy strength in the position of General Yozarro. No flag of truce had been called into use, and the American, after having forcibly captured the boat of the other, had voluntarily placed himself in his power, following the suggestion of General Bambos and his own impulses.

It was Bambos who broke the oppressive hush by saying to him:

"The words of General Yozarro are just; comply with what he demands, and he will be glad to restore you to your friends; am I not correct, General?"

"I suppose so," was the sour response.

"Then my answer is that I'll see the whole gang of you hanged first! You don't get Martella without the biggest fight of your lives, and you don't keep me on this old tub without a bigger fight; I'm not afraid of the whole pack of jail birds of you!"

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

ARREST him!" commanded General Yozarro, speaking directly to Colonel Carlos Del Valle, his chief of staff, standing next to the American; "put him in irons."

The officer addressed reached out his hand to lay on the shoulder of Jack Starland, who, at that instant, recalled the knockout blow he had given Cadet Hillman of the First Class, one memorable spring morning at old Fort Putnam, West Point. It was the same lightning-like stroke which crashed into the face of the colonel and sent him staggering and toppling back to the opposite side of the cabin. Then, whipping out his revolver, Starland backed from the cabin, ran down the steps to the bow of the boat, and before any one suspected his purpose, shouted to his own executive officer:

"Captain Winton, I am betrayed! Open fire, and sink this tug!"

Then he wheeled about and with leveled weapon, added:

"I will kill the first man who attempts to lay a finger on me!"

General Yozarro and his officers showed more promptitude than would have been expected. Seeing that a conflict was inevitable, they set out to win by their own quickness. Their armament was heavier than that of the American yacht,—that is to say, though his pieces carried smaller missiles, he had two of them, while that of the *Warrenia* was a brass saluting twelve-pounder.

The port gun was slewed around and pointed at the other craft, now within twenty-five yards, and in a twinkling it bore fairly.

"Fire!" shouted the excited General, too savage to regard the usual preliminaries.

Major Starland shuddered, for he saw the gun seemingly directed true and knew it must do great destruction on his yacht. The gunner snapped the lanyard, but a dull click followed and there was no discharge.

General Yozarro uttered an oath and Captain Ortega called from the pilot house:

"That is the one which was not loaded!"

Jack Starland had forgotten the fact in

the flurry of the moment. He smiled and looked across at his own boat. Captain Winton did not throw away a second. He signalled to the engine room, quickly veered, and the brass twelve-pounder was pointed fairly at the tug. Meantime, by working frantically, the gunners quickly loaded the piece on the Atlamalcan craft and swung it around to bear on the other.

"Look out for the Major!" called Captain Winton; "he is standing at the front."

While the native gunners were awaiting the critical second, there was a white puff, a red belch of flame, and a thunderous report rolled over the river and against the shores. A smashing sound, the splintering of wood and a number of yells followed, the ball having torn its way through the cabin and splashed into the river beyond.

In this crisis, General Yozarro displayed unexpected coolness. General Bambos hurriedly sagged down behind the pile of wood at the front, as if mortally hurt, but he was merely taking precautions against becoming so.

"Quick!" roared General Yozarro; "sink their boat!"

The haste was unwise, for the gunners were not wholly lacking in skill, but they were flustered by the furious orders of their brutal chief, and fired sooner than they intended. It would have seemed that with so brief a distance separating the combatants a miss was impossible; but the heavy missile only grazed the foremast, dropping somewhere among the trees on the southern shore.

"Hurrah!" shouted the delighted Major, swinging his hat; "let the good work go on! Keep it up! The Stars and Stripes forever!"

Colonel Del Valle had recovered from the fierce blow that sent him spinning across the cabin and was aflame with anger. He, too, had a revolver, and, heedless of the wild turmoil and confusion, in which a half dozen were injured by the flying splinters, he sneaked forward toward the hurrahing American. He raised his hand tremulous with fury, and sighting as well as he could through his watery, bloody eyes, let fly.

The crack of the weapon amid the tumult caused Major Starland to turn like a flash. He saw he had forgotten himself, and that in all probability he had a fight on his hands.

"I don't want to kill you, Colonel, but you need a lesson."

The officer was backing away, when at the flash of the other weapon, he uttered a howl and skurried into the cabin with his right arm dangling useless. The American saw his pistol fall, and darting forward, picked it up. He now had two revolvers, and with only a single empty chamber in each. He backed against the pile of wood, to prevent any one getting behind him, and confronted the mob. Moreover, it was necessary that his friends should see where he was in order to avoid harming him.

A gun on each boat had been fired, and it now became a race as to which could reload and fire again. The American won, because of a slight advantage at the start. No attempt was made on the tugboat to bring the second piece into action. The captains of each craft displayed admirable skill. Captain Winton tried to keep out of range of his enemy, but Captain Ortega swung around so as to hold him in direct line all the time.

Starland's mate and one of his seamen were handling the cannon on the yacht. The latter had served at Manila and knew his business.

As cool as if taking part in the naval maneuvers, he waited until sure the second shot would do the business. Without giving heed to the crew striving desperately to bring the other gun to bear, he crouched till the gun was pointed exactly right and then blazed away.

He had aimed at the screw of the tugboat and he struck it so fairly that the stem snapped off and the blades dropped to the bottom of the river. This was at the suggestion of the mate, who, not wishing to kill any one, only sought to put the other craft out of action.

It was done. The tug was as helpless as a log, but not until Captain Ortega called from the pilot house, making known the nature of the disaster, did General Yozarro understand the mortal injury his navy had received.

"Bully!" shouted the Major; "put the next shot through her boiler! Don't mind me! I can swim and don't care for a little thing like being blown up!"

General Bambos heard the terrifying news and climbed tremblingly to his feet.

"Don't let them fire again! We shall all be killed!"

"Only one thing can save you," replied

the Major aglow with the light of triumphant battle; "run up the white flag! The next shot will send you to kingdom come!"

It was General Yozarro, who, catching the panic, whipped out his white silken handkerchief, and standing within arm's length of his prisoner, excitedly fluttered it aloft.

"Cease firing!" commanded Major Starland; "they have surrendered!"

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE notice was in the nick of time. The gun on the yacht was loaded and trained again, and, had it been fired, would have played the mischief on the Atlamalcan boat.

Captain Winton began edging the *Warrenia* toward the other, with the purpose of running alongside and receiving its submission. Reading his intention, Major Starland called:

"Don't do that! You can't trust these scoundrels! They will board!"

"That's what we want 'em to do!" called back the captain.

"I'd like it too, but we have ladies to look after; send a boat to take off General Yozarro and me."

In the midst of the hubbub and confusion, Captain Ortega was seen to lean out of the window of the pilot house, quickly level his revolver and fire in the direction of the Amer-

ican. It looked like a deliberate attempt to assassinate the unsuspecting officer before anyone could interfere. Jack Starland did not observe the act, but the cry of a man alongside of him caused him to turn his head. Taking advantage of the confusion, one of General Yozarro's officers had slipped behind the American unnoticed by him, and was stealing upon him with drawn knife. The two Generals could not have failed to see him, but neither interposed. A few seconds more and the weapon would have been driven into the back of Starland. Captain Ortega, however, sent his bullet straight and true, the miscreant falling dead in his tracks.

Still leaning out of the window, with smoking pistol in hand, Captain Ortega, as cool as ever, made himself heard above the din:

"You mustn't forget down there that we have surrendered!"

The wheel being useless, he now came out of the pilot house and stood like a general overlooking and directing his forces.

It was begun and ended, as may be said, in the twinkling of an eye. Jack Starland did not forget the lesson. He was yet in the midst of as treacherous a lot of wretches as so many

Apaches. He edged farther forward with his glances alternating between his own craft and the excited throng near him, and so alert that further interference in his behalf was unnecessary.

Looking up to Captain Ortega, he caught his eye and saluted:

"Thank you with all my heart!"

The other returned the salute but did not speak. His weapon was still in his hand and not a movement below eluded him. Generals Bambos and Yozarro were standing beside each other, the latter with his handkerchief still in his hand, though he ceased to flutter it, since the necessity had passed. Now and then the two spoke in low tones, for the turmoil was succeeded by a hush that was impressive.

The order of Major Jack was obeyed on board his own boat. Holding the yacht so that, like the other, it drifted with the current, the tender was lowered, and two seamen entered and began rowing toward the motionless tug. With slow, even strokes and without any sign of misgiving, they rounded to alongside. Major Starland shoved one revolver in his pocket, where it could be in-

stantly drawn, and held the other ready for any emergency.

"You first, General," he said bowing to the leader who had surrendered.

Holding back, he sullenly asked:

"Why should I go aboard your vessel?"

"In accordance with the rules of civilized warfare, of which, of course, you know nothing. For the first time in your life you will be among gentlemen, and, therefore, need feel no fear."

With ill grace, the Dictator stepped carefully down and seated himself at the bow of the smaller boat.

"And now myself," was the good natured remark of the American, as he lightly followed. It was a trying moment, for he half expected a shot in the back, even though it would have meant the death of General Yozarro and the destruction of the tugboat. Captain Ortega must have feared something of the kind, for he stepped to the edge of the upper deck, leaned forward with his revolver grasped and kept a keen watch upon every man. It is not impossible that his vigilance averted a tragedy.

With the same even stroke, the small boat

was rowed across the brief, intervening space, and the mate, Dick Horton, reached down, took the hand of the General and gave so lusty a pull that he stumbled forward and barely saved himself from sprawling on his hands and knees. The next instant Jack sprang among his friends, who crowded around, grasped his hands and showered him with congratulations.

During the flurry, Aunt Cynthia and Miss Starland had been kept beyond reach of harm, but they were now among the group that welcomed the owner of the pretty craft.

"Had you wished to give them the safest place," said he, "you should have let them stand at the bow in plain sight."

"Only the fear of a possible accident prevented that being done," replied the mate.

When General Yozarro saw the young woman in the laughing, happy company, he took off his hat, bowed low and said with his old-time obsequiousness:

"The pain of this meeting is turned to delight by the sight once more of your beauteous countenance and your charming self."

Looking him in the eyes, she measured her words:

*"Que V. se atreva á dirigirse á mi, es el mayor insulto de mi vida."*

The face crimsoned as if from the sting of a whiplash across the eyes, and those of the bystanders who understood the words, broke into a thrilling murmur of applause. General Yozarro tried to hide his repulse by turning to Major Starland:

"I have come aboard this vessel at your command; what do you desire of me?"

"Your sword."

The Dictator meekly drew the blade from its scabbard and extended the hilt toward the American, who recoiled.

"I refuse it; keep it; and take with you the remembrance that the most dangerous thing mortal man can fool with is an American."

"Are you through?"

"I am, and I hope never to look upon your face again."

"*Mal rayo te parta!* Your wish is reciprocated; I will return to my boat."

"*Adios,* General Yozarro!"

The sullen fellow made no reply, and was assisted over the side and rowed back to the crippled tug by the two sailors who had brought him away. During the unique inter-

view, the crew and officers crowded the gunwale and watched proceedings with the keenest interest. Among them was the bulky General Bambos.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

IT may be thought that the most galling experience of General Yozarro was the scarifying repulse of Miss Starland, when he presumed to address her; but unknown to all except the author of the insult and himself, he was compelled to taste a deeper dreg in the cup of wormwood and gall. While he paused, facing the group of Americans, a man on the outer fringe succeeded in catching his eye and made the most taunting grimace conceivable. He repeated it several times, the last being accompanied by a flirt of the forefinger across the throat to signify that that was the way he would like to serve the murderous tyrant. The man who thus grossly insulted him was Martella, the deserter, who chuckled with delight when he heard the stinging answer given to General Yozarro by Miss Starland. The others were too interested in what was going on before them to observe the by-play.

General Yozarro set his teeth and took consolation in the thought:

"General Bambos will give him to me and I will punish him; I will do the same with Captain Guzman for aiding the foul ingrate."

But the Dictator never did either. Jack Starland was not the one to forget the service of his friends. He had no trouble in persuading Martella to engage himself as one of the firemen on the *Warrenia,* for wages that were three-fold what he had received—when he did receive them which was not often—in his own country. Something in the nature of a compromise was made with Captain Guzman. He could not be induced to go so far as the great Republic of the North, but halted at Caracas.

"I am so accustomed to revolutions," said he with a grin and shrug, "that I should die of weariness in your noble country, but here I shall have all that my heart craves."

"It has much that look," replied Major Starland, as he shook him by the hand, after compelling him to accept a generous *douceur* from himself and Miss Starland.

Returning from this digression, the small boat was kept under careful survey until it

returned from the *General Yozarro*. Some feared that a musket shot might be fired at the seamen, for the Atlamalcan is hot-headed and reckless, and the fully loaded saluting gun was kept pointed.

"If I have to fire again," grimly said the mate, "I shall send the ball through her boiler, and sink the whole gang."

Fortunately the necessity did not arise. The most prominent form on the tug was that of Captain Ramon Ortega, standing in front of the pilot house on the upper deck. Pistol in hand, his watchfulness no doubt prevented any treacherous act, for all who knew him knew his unflinching sense of honor and his personal bravery. When the peril passed, he put away his weapon and stood with hands thrust in the side pockets of his light jacket.

Up went the hand of Miss Starland and she fluttered aloft her handkerchief.

"I see no reason why he should not recognize me as a friend *now*," she explained to the Major at her side.

The other saw her and lifted his hat and bowed low. Jack Starland did the same and called a cheery good bye to him.

"He is the foremost gentleman of the

Atlamalcan Republic, and Señorita Manuela will secure a prize in him."

"No greater than he will secure in her; but what is to become of them?"

"Of whom?"

"Their boat is so injured that they are helpless."

"No doubt General Yozarro will be able to float another loan big enough to provide his navy with a new screw; until then, he may limp along as best he can."

At this moment, Mate Horton came forward with the same question.

"We might tow them down to Zalapata, even with General Bambos on board, but I am not impressed that it is my duty. Let them drift with the current and they will bump up somewhere. It is well that they should have a few hours for meditation. Besides, they have the tender and catboat and can send ashore for help, if they need it. No; I shall have nothing more to do with the gang; they must look out for themselves."

Captain Winton emitted a resounding blast from the whistle, to which the tug responded, and steamed down the river. His intention was to maintain a moderate speed, passing

Zalapata without stop, and to make the first halt at San Luis, which ought to be reached some time during the night.

The Captain did not forget one important fact. While he had been fortunate in ascending the forked river, he had the slightest possible knowledge of it. The utmost circumspection was necessary on his part. The stream was broad and deep, but it had its snags, its "sawyers" like the Mississippi, and its dangerous shoals and shallow places. An experienced pilot can generally locate such spots by the crinkling circles at the surface, but there was a certain risk which would baffle even Captain Ortega. Below San Luis, the river so broadened and deepened, and was so comparatively free from obstructions that practically all peril would be left behind.

Captain Winton strove unremittingly to keep the channel, though that was not always possible. His good fortune in coming up the stream gave him confidence of making the down trip in safety. Fifteen minutes after expressing this belief to Major Starland, the bow of the yacht suddenly rose several feet, there was a quick slackening of speed and the boat settled to rest. No one needed to be told

what it meant: the *Warrenia* had run upon a mud bank and was fast.

"Captain Ortega's performance over again!" said Major Starland, "with the exception that he did it on purpose and I don't think you did."

"I am somewhat of the same opinion myself," growled the Captain, "but here we must stay for several hours at the least."

An instant investigation showed that the yacht had suffered no injury. She was staunchly built, and the impact was like that of a solid body against yielding cotton. Had the mud been rock or compact earth the result must have been disastrous.

The screw was kept viciously going, but it could not drag the boat off. Then the crew toiled for an hour shifting what was movable to the stern, but without result. Next, an anchor was carried a hundred feet up stream and imbedded in the oozy bed of the river, while sturdy arms on board tugged at the connecting hawser by means of a windlass, with the screw desperately helping, but the hull would not yield an inch. Finally the efforts were given up. Nothing remained but to wait

till the rising tide should lift the mountainous burden and swing it free.

When the accident occurred, the tug had been left far out of sight in the winding stream, but about the middle of the afternoon it slowly drifted into view around a sweeping bend. The fact of its coming sideways showed that it was swayed wholly by the current.

"That is curious," remarked the puzzled Major to Mate Horton; "why don't they anchor, or pole to land, or tow the tug ashore with the smaller boats? There is no need of letting the vessel become a derelict simply because she has lost her screw."

The interest of those on the yacht naturally centred in the gradually approaching craft, which was closely scanned through the various glasses. Miss Starland stood beside her brother, her instrument leveled, while he used only his unaided eyes. After a time he remarked:

"That boat seems to be moving slowly."

"It isn't moving at all."

She handed the binocular to him, and a moment after pointing it, he exclaimed:

"You are right; it looks as if they did not care for a closer acquaintance."

Mate Horton joined them. He had noticed the same thing.

"What do you make of it, Major?"

He glanced at Miss Starland and then at his friend without speaking. She caught the by-play.

"Don't be afraid to speak before me; you do not seem to have noticed something else about the boat yonder."

"What is that?"

"It has a good many more men on board than when we parted company with it."

## CHAPTER XL.

MAJOR JACK STARLAND flashed up the glass and studied the other craft.

"By Jove! you are right; where do you suppose they came from, Dick?"

"The General must have established communication with his friends soon after we left him; he certainly has a strong crew."

"That means he intends to attack us; it looks as if there is to be a naval battle between an American yacht and the navy of the Atlamalcan Republic."

It was Miss Starland who said this without a trace of excitement, and as if the impending struggle was of only passing interest.

"She is right," observed the mate; "it is hard to tell which has the advantage with one crippled and the other hard aground."

"They will wait till night and then come at us in their small boats. As nearly as I can make out, they have all of twenty men on

board. What is your opinion, Miss Starland?"

She pointed the glass again for several minutes before replying:

"There are nearer forty, for it is certain that some are keeping out of sight. I suppose they are well armed, and it seems to me we are in a bad situation."

"There's no denying it," remarked her brother with a grave face; "they will wait till night and then dash upon us from several sides at the same time; the hour or two before the moon rises will be their opportunity."

"But why," was the natural feminine inquiry, "does General Yozarro molest us? He has always claimed to be your friend, and, until today, has treated us both with courtesy. What pretext can he offer for his course?"

"While there is little in his excuse, it will doubtless be that the owner of this yacht captured his flimsy tug which he persists in calling a gunboat, or rather that I stole it, for which offence he means to punish me."

"Will he not in the end have to reckon with our government?"

"Yes, but he must first reckon with *us*; the affair is a ridiculous one in which to involve

the United States, and I shall not feel proud of my part, if forced to make the appeal; but General Yozarro will find it is no child's play in which he engages when he attacks us. We have not a very full supply of small arms on board, but we shall make things lively for him."

When night closed in, the relative position of the two craft was unchanged. Every possible preparation was made on the yacht, for there could be no doubt of the hostile intentions of the Atlamalcans. A small boat was seen to leave its side and pass to the southern shore. Followed through the glasses, it disclosed two seamen swaying the oars, but when it returned after a brief absence, it held six passengers. The crew of the crippled tug was fast growing and General Yozarro had certainly made good use of his time.

The twelve-pounder of the *Warrenia* was loaded to the muzzle. Six rifles were distributed among the men, several of whom had revolvers and all knives. Lookouts were placed at all points. The conviction was that during the brief period of gloom before the rising of the moon, two or three or possibly more small boats, crowded with armed men, would

dash simultaneously upon the grounded craft and strive desperately to board her.

The sanguinary fight that impended, with the certain loss of life on both sides, could be averted by a surrender, which calm judgment would have justified under the peculiar circumstances, but it was not strange that even Miss Starland and Aunt Cynthia hinted nothing of that nature. As for the officers and crew, they eagerly awaited the conflict with a band whom they despised. Although greatly outnumbered, not one doubted their ability to repel the attempt to board. There was only one condition that they would have changed; that was the presence of the ladies. They could be safeguarded during the fight, but it would have been better had they been far away. Such absence, however, was impossible and no one referred to it.

But the naval battle never took place. When all the defenders were alert and on edge, it was observed that the yacht was floating. The disappointment was felt keenly even by the bellicose cook. There was a general peering into the gloom in the hope of discerning the approaching boats, and a sigh when they failed to appear.

"It sometimes takes more courage to run away than to fight," said Major Starland with a laugh; "therefore we shall run away."

He called his orders to Captain Winton, who, having shaken off the clutch of the mud, turned the prow of the craft so as to flank the obstruction, and signalled the engineer to go ahead at moderate speed. At the same time, he sent out a reverberating blast from the whistle, which the Atlamalcans might accept as a parting salute.

The yacht steamed carefully down the river, and in the early hours of the morning passed Zalapata, where a few lights twinkled, and then proceeded toward the more pretentious town of San Luis. The only ones awake on the *Warrenia* were those whose duties required them to be alert, and Captain Winton, knowing that General Bambos was absent, held the whistle mute as he went by.

* * * * * *

If the yacht *Warrenia* and its crew and passengers had been called upon to pass through a series of stirring incidents while in tropical America, a rare and most gratifying experience now came to them. The weather remained calm and the run to the southern

extremity of the continent was as smooth and tranquil as it had been across the Caribbean Sea. When the neighborhood of Cape Horn was reached, Major Starland, in order to keep his pledge with his father, took the wheel. Captain Winton lit his pipe, sat down in the pilot house and grimly waited until his services were necessary.

But not for an hour were they required, except now and then, in the way of simple relief. He had passed that danger region more than once, but never had he seen it so free of storm and rough weather. There was not a single moment when the yacht was in the slightest danger. In fact, to emphasize the wonderful, summer-like calmness of those usually turbulent waters, which are the dread of veteran navigators, Miss Starland held the spokes of the wheel for several hours. Such good fortune is not likely to come to a navigator once in a score of times.

When the yacht steamed out of the wide mouth of the Amazon and headed southward, the assumed relationship between Major Starland and his "sister" was dropped. There was no call to keep it up, since every one on board knew the truth.

The *Warrenia* was well up the western coast of South America and steaming rapidly toward the city of the Golden Gate. Hardly a breath of air rippled the bright waters, and the sky overhead was brilliant with its myriads of stars, whose gleam was intensified in the soft crystalline atmosphere.

Major Starland was seated on a camp chair, where he and Miss Rowland were sheltered from the wind created by the motion of the yacht. She hardly needed the gaudily-colored zarape wrapped about her shoulders. They had been talking of their strange experiences, of Manuela Estacardo, of Captain Ortega and of those whose memories were much less pleasant.

You can imagine the trend of that low, delightful conversation, for the scene, the surroundings, the time, indeed all the circumstances tended to draw them closer. What was said was too sacred in its nature, for us to quote in full: the conclusion is enough.

"Warrenia, you have played the sister for some weeks to perfection. You must have become accustomed to hearing yourself called 'Miss Starland;' it certainly has a familiar sound by this time."

"Yes," she replied, ceasing her efforts to disengage her hand from the fingers that had made it prisoner; "it could not well be otherwise. You know there is quite a similarity in our names."

"What I wish to ask, Sweetheart, is whether you will not agree to make a slight change in the term by which you were addressed so long."

"In what way?" she asked, as if she did not know what was coming.

"Instead of being 'Miss Starland,' will you not consent that your correct name shall be 'Mrs. Starland?' "

At first she begged for time in which to consider the proposition, but Jack was always headlong and presumptuous, as you know, and he insisted, and what could she do but consent? And among all the friends the two most pleased were "Teddy" Rowland and his partner, Tom Starland, when they heard the good news.

THE END.

DEC. 25, 1916

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 030 527 6